



”It feels like a healing process...”
-The maintenance of traditional values among the Mohawk of Akwesasne



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Autumn 2008*

Acknowledgements

I want to direct a big thank you to everyone in Akwesasne and Kanatsiohareke for all your help and kindness during the three months I spent with you, and especially to the two amazing and inspiring women that let me stay with them, helped me out, and let me participate in their lives - Nia:wen Ko:wa!

Thank you to my supervisor Jon Schackt for the valuable feedback and critical comments throughout the writing process.

Thank you to the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Tromsø, the Centre for Sami Studies (UiTø), and the Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, for your financial support during my fieldwork.

Thank you to my family for supporting me, and especially to my sister Cathrine for visiting me during my fieldwork. Thank you Aslaug, Marlen and Tor for all your help, feedback, and support, and finally, thank you Emma and Yonas for the constructive and not so constructive time we've spent on and off campus together these past two years, it wouldn't have been the same without you!

Elisabeth Holm

Tromsø, november 2008

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1.0 Introduction

– The Mohawk and the maintenance of indigenous values

This thesis is based on a fieldwork in the Mohawk communities of Akwesasne and Kanatsiohareke, New York. The topic will be on the preservation and revival of Mohawk tradition and language, as a part of processes of recovering from colonialism. I will exemplify this through empirical examples of arenas in which these processes take place, the Akwesasne Freedom School, and the Kanatsiohareke Mohawk Community. My data is largely based on traditional Mohawks' point of view, described to me by my, to a large extent, 'traditional' informants.

Tradition is a recurring topic in this thesis, as it is in Akwesasne and Kanatsiohareke, and I will relate to 'tradition' as an emic¹ term. The Mohawk scholar Chris Jocks defines it as a reference to

“(…) ideas and practices understood to have strong pre-invasion roots, as well as to people who attempt to ground their daily lives – intellectually, affectively, and otherwise- in these ideas and practices” (Jocks 2004:147).

In Akwesasne, people from different factions of the community define themselves as traditional, making it an ambiguous term. Community members on both sides of the gambling issue, for instance, refer to themselves as traditional. As with all peoples, there are different ways and definitions of “being Mohawk”. The people who live in Akwesasne are divided in opinions and world views; some are Catholics or belong to other Christian churches, some vote for the elected council, while others only support the traditional Council of Chiefs, etc. Parts of the population are ‘Longhouse’ people, traditionalists who look to the Longhouse religion and teachings, and work actively to hand this over to the next generations. Not everyone who follows tradition would define himself or herself as being Longhouse, though. Bruce Johansen (1993) defines being traditional in Akwesasne as

“(…) a person or a family who chooses to live outside the “mainstream” life imposed on Native Americans by the European or white culture and governments (Johansen 1993:xxvii).

¹ As used by the local inhabitants themselves.

A traditional person often only supports the political system of the Iroquois that predate European contact, and does not support the provincial, state or federal elections².

“Often such people also mesh their everyday lives with a degree of spirituality and respect for the earth that may be difficult for many non-Indians in the late twentieth century to comprehend. A significant proportion of Akwesasne’s Mohawks do this today” (ibid.).

Jocks’ and Johansen’s definitions are descriptive for many Akwesasne Mohawks, and descriptive for the people I spent the most time with there.

In a process of cultural revival and preservation, tradition becomes of central importance as the ‘core’ of one’s culture and in bridging people together. I want to show examples of how this plays out in everyday practice and life amongst traditional Mohawk people in specific locations today. Many Native American peoples are described in books and documents in the past tense, as if they do not exist anymore. This is not a fitting description of the *Haudenosaunee*/Iroquois nations, even though not everyone lives by the tradition or speaks the language. I met people who are fighting hard to preserve their culture and ethnic identity, as individuals and as a people and nation. In this thesis I will place focus on education, because it was in large part through education that Native people experienced the assimilation policy that led to today’s situation, in which people fight to regain their voice and self-confidence.

1.1 Location

The Mohawk –*Kahnienkehaka* (“the People of the Flint”) is a tribe or nation in the *Haudenosaunee*/Iroquois Confederacy, also known as the Six Nations. The other *Haudenosaunee* nations are the Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora. The original Five Nations³ joined together to form a peaceful alliance under a democratic constitution known as the *Kaianerakowa* – The Great Law of Peace about one thousand years ago. Mohawk communities today are located in present-day New York State, Ontario and Quebec.

The two communities addressed in this thesis are the Kanatsiohareke Mohawk Community, an off-reservation settlement in the Mohawk Valley; and the Mohawk Nation territory of Akwesasne/St.Regis Mohawk Reservation. Both of these communities

² The elected councils also support work to preserve tradition, like the Freedom School, though.

³ The Tuscaroras were included in the *Haudenosaunee* Confederacy in the early 1700s.

are important arenas for the furthering of traditional Mohawk values today. Akwesasne, or the St.Regis Mohawk Reservation is located by the St.Lawrence River. Officially, the New York State side is known as St.Regis, and the Canadian side as Akwesasne, but most people in the area refer to the whole community as Akwesasne, which means “The Land where the Partridge Drums”. It is the home of about 13000 people, and is located on the borders between present-day New York, Ontario, and Quebec.

The other Mohawk community I will address is Kanatsiohareke (pronounced ‘ga-na-jo-ha-lay-gay’), which means “The Place of the Clean Pot”. Kanatsiohareke was established in 1993, after a handful of families moved there from Akwesasne. They wanted to start a new life in the Mohawk Valley, away from the social problems of Akwesasne; a place where they could live by the traditional teachings of the Mohawk people. People come and go and the population varies from time to time; when I visited the number of inhabitants was only seven. The community runs an organic farm, host festivals and conferences to tell people about the Mohawk culture and tradition, in addition to giving lessons in *Kanienkeha*, the Mohawk language. I spent some time in Kanatsiohareke, and learned about the Mohawk people’s history, tradition and cosmology, and I met people who are working hard to preserve and revitalize this heritage, both in Kanatsiohareke and in Akwesasne.

1.2 Focus

An important way to preserve traditional knowledge and language, and hand it over to the younger generations, is through education. I spent some time during my fieldwork visiting the Akwesasne Freedom School, a language immersion school where the curriculum is based on the traditional Mohawk teachings and knowledge, which through most of the schooling instructed in the Mohawk language. The school was a good place to witness the reviving, teaching and articulation of the complex and holistic Mohawk tradition.

This thesis is a story about cultural revival, identity formulation and articulation of an ethnic and cultural identity. It is about a people’s fight for sovereignty, self-determination, autonomy, and the right to tell their own history; to teach their children about their culture, tradition and language in their own terms and in their own way. I will analyze my empirical data as a part of a healing process and as a way of recovering from colonialism and its effects.

Healing is a concept with deep roots in Native American cultures, a concept with meaning and significance. It relates to a cosmology and world view where the conception of balance is an essential factor. Healing and medicine are not just concepts connected to physical diseases and illnesses, but to illness in the form of an unbalance in one's life, community, the world, etc. Thus, environmental degradation is a sign of illness and unbalance in nature, substance abuse and anger unbalance in individuals, etc. This is an important part of how traditional Mohawk people relate to the world, connected to a continuous past where Mohawks have emphasized balance and peace, as expressed in the Great Law of Peace. Thus, "decolonization" as a healing process seems to make sense in this context.

Decolonization is a social process, not just a political one in the form of fighting for sovereignty, land rights, etc. People want to heal from the pain of specific wounds and reactions from colonialism, such as pollution, alcoholism, gambling addictions, the experiences from residential schools, etc. Individuals also try to heal from general feelings of uncertainty, the lack of knowledge about their own culture, language, or their own place in the world. It becomes important to heal the wounds and stress caused by colonization, the feeling of being colonized on a personal and collective level. A personal goal for most traditional Mohawks is to have *kanikenriio*- a 'Good Mind', which may be achieved through a continuous process of learning from your experiences, good or bad, and to have peace within yourself and to be the best person you can be. The Peacemaker, who brought the message of the Great Law, emphasized Peace, Power, and Righteousness as central traits for a person and a people. When this is achieved, it is said, one is happy and there will be no more fear or wars, and one will be respected by other people.

1.3 Analytical approach

In Mohawk communities, as a part of a process of reviving and furthering traditional knowledge and cosmology, it is discussed internally, explicitly and implicitly, what are considered to be the true Mohawk values, expressions, and tradition. For an outsider, the most visible disagreements in Akwesasne on this issue are between Longhouse traditionalists, members of the Warrior Society, and Christians. Although there seem to be a common idea of the *basis* of Mohawk traditions, there are as many different ways of interpreting these, as there are people who emphasize them as a part of their world view and identity.

Anthropologists have discussed tradition from many different perspectives, and many theories about tradition connect it to 'modernity'. In anthropological writing the recreation or invention of a past or 'tradition' has been debated for quite some time. Anderson (1983) and Hobsbawm et al. (1983) debated how modern 'Western' states of today invented their 'traditions' as acts of nationalism in 'imagined communities' in the nineteenth century. Others have questioned how indigenous peoples today handle a process of recreating an invisible past (Hanson 1989). Anthropologists at the time, according to Hanson, recognized "'traditional culture' as being more an invention constructed for contemporary purposes than a stable heritage handed on from the past" (Hanson 1989: 890).

Although I agree with Hanson that tradition has contemporary purposes, I will argue that tradition in some instances is more than just political strategies and constructions or inventions, but a goal in itself as a part of the right to define oneself and "knowing who I am", as people expressed it. Further, I will argue that theories that polarize 'tradition' to 'modernity' seem to suggest that 'tradition' is a reflection of an idea of the past, not the past seen as a reality, in the words of Bjørn Bjerkli (1996). If we see 'tradition' as a polarization of 'modernity', a limitation to the definition of 'tradition' may be that it seems like 'traditional' ways are vested in static ways of acting. Traditions are dynamic and changing, and a significant part of indigenous peoples' world view and everyday life, though interpreted in various ways. It is important that we find new, critical ways of thinking about 'tradition', so that we can grasp the inherent dynamics of it (ibid.).

To make 'traditions' visible is also important in processes of revitalization and strengthening of ethnic or national identities. It helps to create a common past that larger groups of people can refer to and identify with (Bjerkli 1996).

A political aspect of furthering tradition in indigenous communities, in addition to the internal discourses, is through the relationship between the indigenous people and another culture or the mainstream society. Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2000) has argued that in this globalized world, groups who want to keep a sense of continuity and belonging intact, can only do this through political battles, because we are living in a 'posttraditional' time. Thus, he says, tradition can no longer explain or justify itself, it has to be compared to the options that exist. A traditional life is impossible, while 'traditionalism', as a modern

ideology that emphasizes tradition as an alternative to the insecurity and turbulence in the world, is possible.

I will analyze the maintenance of tradition as a part of processes of ‘decolonization’, defined by Waziyatawin and Michael Yellow Bird (2005) as “the intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our [indigenous peoples’] minds, bodies, and lands, and it is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation” (2005:2).

“(…) Balance and harmony do not characterize the world that we live in; instead, it is dominated by the selfish motivations of modern economies and institutions. As a people and as a race, we have strayed far from Sonkwaiontison’s original instructions. The lack of respect shown to traditional teachings and the near abandonment of traditional practices has brought discord and destruction to all of our relationships” (Alfred 1999:9)

“A lot of our Indian nations didn’t change from their original truths until just a couple of hundred years ago, really. So they still have a close connection, even people who didn’t grow up or weren’t born in Indian country. It is still in the membrane of our society so much that it transcends our colonization somewhat. It’s hard to understand, but it’s *there*. And it wouldn’t be hard to make it come back again, make it real. Of all the people in the world, we are probably the ones that could do it the fastest because we haven’t been removed from it that long, actually. So we have a lot of advantage in a way. But on the other hand, we have a disadvantage because our heart was just recently raped and ripped apart. And so it’s going to take healing in order for that to go to the next step” (Porter 2008:42).

The layout of the thesis is as followed: In the following chapter I will turn to look at the methods used during my fieldwork, and the role I had as a fieldworker. In chapter three I will present a context for my empirical data in the form of some central historical events that are relevant for Mohawk traditionalism and for Native-run education today, before I address parts of Akwesasne’s recent history as framework. In chapter four I will look at the political structure of the *Haudenosaunee*, the local politics in Akwesasne, and then turn to look at the idea of decolonization as a factor in the importance placed on

preserving tradition. In chapter five I will address the Akwesasne Freedom School, and the role it plays for young Mohawk students as well as Akwesasne as a community, and in chapter six I will look at the Kanatsiohareke Mohawk Community as another important arena for Mohawk traditionalism. In the final chapter I will look at tradition with its expressions, significance and meanings through some perspectives I find useful on this topic.

2.0 Fieldwork in Akwesasne and offshoots

'Participant Observation' is the commonly used anthropological method for field research. It involves both observing and participating like one would in one's own day-to-day life, but it includes a more thorough reflexivity about the things one sees and does. James Spradley (1980) examines different degrees of participation, from nonparticipation to complete participation. I would say that my degree of participation at the Akwesasne Freedom School for the most part was 'moderate', in James Spradley's words, who describes 'moderate participation' as "when the ethnographer seeks to maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participation and observation" (1980:58). I mostly did not do the same work as the students or teachers did, but mainly observed what instructions were made and how they were carried out.

At other times I was an active participant at the school, when I was helping out in class or went on camping trips with the oldest students. Being an active participant is defined as seeking "to *do* what other people are doing, not merely to gain acceptance, but to more fully learn the cultural rules for behavior. Active participation begins with observations, but as knowledge of others grows, the ethnographer tries to learn the same behavior" (Spradley 1980:60). I also participated in dancing at socials and working as a volunteer at the strawberry festival at Kanatsiohareke. At certain moments, such as every time the *Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen*, the Thanksgiving Address, was said, I became a 'passive' participant, since I do not speak Mohawk or know the words. Spradley defines being a 'passive participant' as being present at the scene of action, but to not participate or interact with other people to any great extent. Sometimes I stood in the ring of people who were saying the *Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen*, though, except in class at the Freedom School. This happened for reasons not conscious to me, but which I believe was mostly a result of my own fear of disturbing.

I mostly did not write fieldnotes while talking to people, but instead wrote them immediately afterwards, as I felt that it would not be respectful, and that it would have made the setting artificially formal, like the notebook would be an 'extra person' in the room, metaphorically speaking. Initially I feared that this would make my fieldnotes less accurate, but I developed a very good memory and techniques to remember what people had said and how they said it, so I do feel that my fieldnotes are accurate. At other times during conversations, at the more planned interviews, I asked my informants whether they would mind if I wrote down what they were saying. When I asked people about this,

they usually replied that they expected me to write while they were talking. In a society which has gotten used to researchers, I could probably have used my field diary more openly, but as mentioned, I did not want to treat people as research objects, but as what I thought of them as: informants, teachers, and, eventually, friends.

2.1 Arrival and first impressions

Before I left Norway, I had some problems getting in touch with the Mohawk communities I contacted. Thus, my plans were somewhat vague as I got on the plane to the U.S. When I first arrived in the United States, I contacted one of the inhabitants of a small Mohawk community to see if she could help me get settled somewhere where I could learn something about ‘traditional’ Mohawks and Mohawk culture in general. She let me come to her community, Kanatsiohareke, which was established 15 years ago by a group of people who wanted to move away from Akwesasne. I first stayed in this community for about a week, learning about the history of the community and about Mohawk culture and tradition, and the different ways of living according to it.

The plans I made before I left home was to hopefully get permission to stay in this community during my fieldwork. We decided, though, that so few people were living there most of the year and not enough was going on there for me to base my whole fieldwork on that community. So the woman I first got in touch with made some phone calls and took me up north to the Akwesasne Mohawk Reservation. There I was introduced to one of the teachers at what I learned is a very important school for many people in Akwesasne, the Freedom School. The teacher let me stay in her home, and let me come to work with her at the school throughout the summer. Throughout my fieldwork I traveled back and forth between Akwesasne and Kanatsiohareke, getting to know people and learning about the culture and traditions of the Mohawk People. The history and people’s stories I was told outlined an eventful past, present, and future.

Kanatsiohareke turned out to be a smaller community than I had imagined, and there was not as much going on as I had expected. Still, I was there through the Fasting ritual, the Strawberry Festival and other gatherings in the community, with people coming in from near and far. Akwesasne was busier than I had thought, with much traffic and noise. The two communities are about six hours apart by car, separated by the Adirondack Mountains. Many of the same people are involved in both Kanatsiohareke and the Freedom School, as the inhabitants of Kanatsiohareke originally came from

Akwasasne. This turned out to be a very helpful fact for me, since I entered a network of people connected to both places from the start.

During my stay in the field I came to realize that the work and processes to revive, maintain and transfer tradition is not just a matter of national or ethnic pride and resistance to mainstream assimilation. It is also a matter of working to heal and recover from colonization and its effects, like the loss, or threat to lose land, culture, language, and respect.

2.2 Challenges and my role as fieldworker

The challenges I expected to face when I started my fieldwork was first of all related to how I could “get into the field”; how I could be included in the community and have people talk about their life with me. This was solved not so much through conscious choices, but as results of consequences and the help of my informants. I was also conscious about ethical issues I could face while doing fieldwork in an indigenous society.

When I first entered the small community in the south, I was given an advice: “Do not ask too many questions, just spend time with people, and work with people. That is the best way to learn about Mohawk culture”. This type of approach was in line with my idea of how I was going to learn as much as possible during my stay. I don’t always believe that doing interviews is the best way of getting information or learning something, as it may be experienced as very formal for both parts. Spradley (1980:124) separates ‘informal ethnographic interviews’ and ‘formal ethnographic interviews’, the former being what I did most of the time: asking questions when they appeared relevant, instead of doing formal interviews, which are usually requested beforehand to appear at a certain time and place. Often I would ask descriptive questions (Spradley 1980), like “Can you tell me what happens during a Longhouse burial?” or “What do you see in the future for the Freedom School?”, so that people could tell me what they wanted to emphasize without me asking ‘leading’ questions.

During my stay, I was given different kinds of feedback to what I was doing. Some people thought I asked too many questions still, and others compared me to other researchers, and thought that I asked too few questions. No one I met openly reacted negatively to my presence there, though. During my fieldwork I was met with less scepticism than I had feared, as I knew that many people are sick of being subjected to studies by anthropologists and other scientists. Most people were very willing to help me

and talk to me about Mohawk culture, tradition, and even their own experiences and life stories, though I was approached by people who told me how they felt about the type of studies that I was doing as well. One man I met at Kanatsiohareke criticized me for just scratching the surface of another culture than my own, that I would not learn much. But he added that I should learn as much as I could, and then take it home and educate people there about what I learned about Mohawk people. To really know another culture, he said, you have to live there for many, many years. Even he, who grew up in the Mohawk culture still does not feel like he knows it. I tried to be open to people about this issue, though, that I did not expect to know everything after just three months, but I wanted to learn as much as possible during my stay.

People made me feel very much at home when I was in Akwesasne, some even told me that I had become a part of the community after staying there for so long. The times when I felt like I had not, was mostly when I met the customs officers on the border between the USA and Canada. In Akwesasne I stayed on the Canadian side of the border, and so every day when we were going to the school, which is located on the U.S. side, and every afternoon when we came back, we had to show ID and I had to tell the customs officers what I was doing there. Usually, Akwesasne residents do not have to show ID when crossing the border, but when I was in the car we had to stop. I was taken to the immigration office several times and had to tell them exactly what I was doing there, and if I was bringing guns, drugs or large sums of money. They also asked me whom I was staying with, how long I had known them and if I trusted them. One time one of the customs officers was surprised to hear that I had come all the way from Norway to learn about Mohawk culture. She laughed and said “Well...I hope you get to know some *good* sides to it then...”. When I told my Mohawk informants what she had said, they told me that this kind of attitude was not unusual even if not all the customs officers were like that. We figured, though, that some of these officers mostly meet Mohawk people who are smuggling goods across the border, so it is not *surprising* that some of them are negative towards Mohawk people in general.

The issue of the border crossing between the United States and Canada that runs straight through Akwesasne, is something that provokes many Mohawk people. Some *Awesasneron* had argued so much with the customs officers about having to show ID to travel through their own land, so today crossing is not a problem anymore for them. Mostly the residents in Akwesasne are recognized by the officers, and do not have to show ID. Once I crossed the border with a man who does not have a clan, since his

mother is not Mohawk, and thus does not have a Mohawk Nation ID card. I noticed he was asked many of the same questions that I was.

I realized early in my fieldwork that for me to get into and to get to know Akwesasne, it would be through my relations to the “right people”, someone who could introduce me to people it would be useful for me to talk to. I was told later on by an *Akwesasneron*, a resident of Akwesasne, that it would have been very difficult for me to get into the reservation had I not been introduced to it by people from Kanatsiohareke. Tom Porter, who established Kanatsiohareke, is considered to be a strong spiritual leader and a highly respected man among the *Haudenosaunee* Nations, and he wants Natives and non-Natives to learn from and about each other. Even if I thought about this before I got there, the fact that I met many of the “right people” was still mostly coincidences and very good help from the two women I stayed with, in Kanatsiohareke and Akwesasne, who introduced to people I did not know about beforehand.

Once I was taken to the school, I saw this as a great opportunity to learn directly about the school and how children are taught the traditional Mohawk way of life through education. I did not spend much time with the youngest students, since they were only supposed to speak Mohawk at school, but I was allowed by the teachers of the oldest students to stay in the classrooms during classes, and to help out if there was anything I could do. I spent the most time in the seventh grade, the transition class, and found it very interesting to see how the students transitioned from full immersion in Mohawk to speaking, writing, and getting instructions in English. The seventh, eight and ninth grade went on two camping trips in the Adirondack Mountains, and I was allowed to come along. There I also got to see what the students were taught outside the classrooms, although one of the trips was mostly meant as a social activity.

In the kind of fieldwork that I did, where I entered a society and culture that I did not know previous to my arrival there, except through books and articles, I was basically constantly ‘doing fieldwork’, in the sense that I was learning new things every day and every time I talked to people. Even if I did not consciously set out to do an interview etc, I got to hear what the person I was talking to thought about things and how he or she sees the world. When I was doing interviews with the teachers and parents at the Freedom School, I mostly did not have to ask more than a few introductory questions, as people were eager to talk about the school.

In Akwesasne I lived with a woman who attended the Ceremonies, did the Fasting ritual at Kanatsiohareke every year, who sacrificed tobacco when we heard the thunder,

etc. The traditional teachings are very much present and relevant in her life, personality, and work as a teacher at the Freedom School. Through living with her I got an impression of how these things fit into her everyday life and at special occasions.

During my fieldwork I thought about what I was willing to do to get information if the situation did not feel right, especially for my informants, but also for myself. A couple of times I was invited to come along when I was not sure that I would feel comfortable being present. Although I was invited and no one said anything about it, at these instances I felt like the outsider that did not belong there. This happened once at a rite of passage for the teenage boys. They had been fasting in the forest alone for the first time, and I was invited to welcome them back and eat with them. When I arrived at the farm the ritual was taking place at, I felt that this was a very private, emotional occasion for the mothers and their sons, and I decided to leave. Although a bit surprised, the people I told did not argue that I should stay. When I told a man I met at Kanatsiohareke about this and how I had felt, he said that he too felt like that sometimes, even if he is Mohawk. “It takes time to feel comfortable in situations like that, and if you do not feel comfortable, you may end up disrupting the spiritual contents...”, he said. He added though, that if I was invited to things like that I should go, especially if an Elder invited me - “one does not say no to the Elders”, he said humorously. I had not been invited by an Elder at this occasion, but I decided to relax more about it, although I never insisted on coming along to something that I was not asked to come to.

Later I was invited to tobacco burnings, a wedding, and socials without consciously feeling like I interrupted. If anyone felt offended by my presence there, they never let me know. When I was asked by my host in Akwesasne if I wanted to go to a wedding in the Longhouse, I was at first surprised and said “But, I’m not invited!”, relating it to how I imagine that some people in Norway would react if strangers just showed up to their wedding. She told me that people are not invited to weddings in the Longhouse, it is open for the whole community, and since I had stayed there for so long that was not a problem. At the wedding, I remembered being told by my host at Kanatsiohareke that everyone that are able to, should dance at least three rounds around the room at weddings, to honor the bride and groom. So towards the end of the ceremony, when the couple were officially married and the celebrations began, I danced along with everyone else, and got positive feedback afterwards for participating.

2.3 Writing the thesis

A common possible problematic issue in ethnographic writing is the presence of oneself, the fieldworker, in the text. I choose to be present in the text, because I believe my presence in the two Mohawk communities provoked certain conversations and actions at times, but also because the only things I *can* say about Mohawk culture are based on my interpretations of it and the interpretations of other individuals who told me their opinions.

Chris Shore states: “(...) ‘the field’ proper is a fluid, loosely connected set of relations, sites, events, actors, agents and experiences from which, and onto which, anthropologists try to impose some kind of conceptual order. Moreover, anthropologists are not like ‘detached’ scientists studying the behaviour of rats from outside a glass cage; we are positioned subjects within those fields and should therefore be ‘objects’ of anthropological enquiry as well. Writing more candid, subjective and reflexive accounts of ‘what really happened during fieldwork’ do at least help to render this more apparent - to ourselves as well as our readers” (Shore 1999:44f).

I have chosen to anonymize my informants, although only one or two people specifically asked me to do so. Halvard Vike (2001) writes that it is usually unfortunate to anonymize data because that involves manipulating data, which again will give it less quality analytically speaking. It is often, though, beneficial to make it uninteresting or hard to track down the people who have given us the information we analyze in our texts. I chose to do the latter out of respect for the privacy of my informants, but I have not anonymized specific places, like Kanatsiohareke and The Akwesasne Freedom School, because the subjects I am addressing should be seen in their specific historical and political contexts.

“The observations and thoughts I am about to relate may be useful or they may not, but read them as a report of my conversations with the tradition, not as the analysis of a superior authority” (Jocks 2004:139).

2.3.1 Terminology

The Mohawk are referred to, and refer to themselves with many names. Many people in the U.S. use “Indian”, and many Natives use it themselves; “American Indian” is also an official term in the U.S., while in Canada the term “First Nations” is common. Another frequently used term is “Native”, “Native American” or specifically “Mohawk” or the

name of other nations. When talking about indigenous peoples in general, people would often say “indigenous” or “aboriginal”. Speakers of the Mohawk language often say *Kanienkehaka*, meaning ‘the People of the Flint’ when talking about the Mohawk Nation, and *Onkwe:honwe*: ‘The original people’ when talking about indigenous peoples. I have chosen to use the terms “Natives” and “Mohawk” in this context, because they were the most frequently used terms during my stay, both by my informants and myself.

I will refer to the different groups of people in Akwesasne; Longhouse traditionalists, Warriors, Catholics, etc., but actually these groups overlap in several ways; for example are the Warriors also traditionalists, but with a different approach than the people I have named Longhouse traditionalists. The Warriors also have a Longhouse building of their own. There are thus different levels of traditionalism, and different definitions of what it means to be traditionalist. To clarify, whenever I use the term ‘traditional Mohawk’, or ‘traditionalist’, I refer to people who emphasise tradition, but who, in general, are not members of the Warrior society. My informants are mostly Longhouse people, but some are also traditionalists who do not visit the Longhouse regularly.

I use the term ‘decolonization’ as a central term in my analysis. Most of my informants rather talked of ‘healing’ and ‘recovering’, but connected this to a sense of being a “colonized people”. I define ‘decolonizing’ in this context as figuring out one’s place in the world and recovering from inflicted wounds caused by colonialism. This does not mean that Mohawk people are likely, or able, to fully go back to a pre-colonial way of life, but that the feeling of *being colonized* can be replaced by a sense of self-definition and self-determination.

3.0 The People of the Longhouse in history

Before I discuss Mohawk traditionalism and decolonization any further, I will in the following chapter describe relevant parts of the Mohawk traditions and culture, as well as the cultural, social, and political context of the communities presented in my case studies. The following aspects of *Haudenosaunee* tradition make up a large portion of the basis for traditionalism today, and are central to the curriculum at the Akwesasne Freedom School.

Traditionally the Mohawk People lived in small extended family groups, with a hunting territory of over a hundred square miles per group. In addition to hunting, the men fished, and wild berries, nuts, fruits, and plants were gathered. At some point later, Mohawks started growing corn, beans and squash, and the communities grew larger. Archaeologists suggest that these communities could have contained up to two thousand people each. With the large communities came permanent institutions like laws and governments. *Haudenosaunee* villages were not permanent, though. When game, fish and firewood became scarce, usually after about ten years, people moved to a new village not far from the last one, since the new had to be built while the old village still stood. When the village became too large with too many people, some people moved and created a separate village (Porter 2006:4).

By the late 1600s Mohawks were trading fur with the French in Montreal, and with the English in New York and Albany. By the mid-1700s, a large number of Mohawks had moved to the Montreal area, attracted by trade, religion, education, etc. Goods from Montreal and Albany continued to flow north and south with the Mohawk as middlemen between the French and the English (ibid).

The Mohawk are one of the nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, also known as the Six Nations⁴. In the Iroquoian languages they are named the *Haudenosaunee*, or *Rotinonshonni*.⁵ The *Haudenosaunee* live in present day New York, Ontario and Quebec, and there is a small population of Oneida in Michigan. The Confederacy members are the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora. The ‘League of Six Nations’ is a strong religious and political confederacy, which has given many people a strong feeling of identity. The League has been, and still is, a well-known and admired confederation. It played a significant part in the relations to the European settlers, and to

⁴ Originally called ‘the Five Nations’, but now ‘The Six Nations’, after the Tuscarora joined the Confederacy in 1714.

⁵ *Rotinonshonni* in the Mohawk language, but they are often referred to as the *Haudenosaunee*, which is the Seneca/Onondaga name.

the development of European and Euro-American political thoughts up until the 1800s (Wilson 1998:142). The *Haudenosaunee* themselves consider the politics of the League as the world's oldest democracy, and thus an important influence of the American Constitution. In *Haudenosaunee* politics and tradition, the women are known to have a strong position as the life bearers. This is said to have inspired the Women's Rights Movements in America.

Iroquois territory originally stretched from the southeast of Canada to North Carolina, and Mohawk territory was the northeastern part of New York State, extending into southeastern Canada and Vermont. The Mohawk, 'the Keepers of the Eastern Door', are the easternmost people of the Six Nations, while the Seneca - "The People of the Hill" are the 'Keepers of the Western Door' in the West. The Cayuga - "The Marshy Land People"/"Great Pipe People", The Oneida - "The Standing Stone People", and The Tuscarora - "The Shirt Wearing People" are known as the Younger Brothers. Finally, the Onondaga Nation is known as "the Keepers of the Fire" (Ronathahon:ni Cultural Centre 2001). In 1888, at a Grand Council of the Six Nations Haudenosaunee Confederacy meeting (cf. p. 31), the Mohawk Nation officially rekindled their responsibilities as one of the Elder Brothers, as the descendants of the inhabitants of the Mohawk Valley. The Grand Council agreed that it was beneficial to stay united when fighting for the rights of Native Americans⁶.

Today there are eight Mohawk reservations and communities; Akwesasne/St.Regis (NYS/Quebec/Ontario), Ganienke (NYS), Kanesatake (Quebec), Kahnawake (Quebec), Tyendinaga (Ontario), Wahta/Gibson (Ontario), Kanatsiohareke (NYS), and Ohsweken/Six Nations/Grand River (Ontario). The 'fire', or capital, is located in Akwesasne.

Kanienkeha - the Mohawk language

The Mohawk language is part of the Iroquoian language family. The alphabet consists of twelve letters, and it does not include any 'hard' consonants like m, p, v, f etc, making it a very 'soft'-sounding language. There are variations in pronunciations, but in Akwesasne a 't' before a vowel sounds like a 'd', 'k' is pronounced similar to a 'g', and 'r' similar to an 'l'. There are mainly three dialects of Mohawk; Western (Six Nations and Tyendinaga), Central (Akwesasne) and Eastern (Kahnawake and Kanehsatake).

⁶ <http://srmt-nsn.gov/his.htm>

Today there are about three and a half thousand fluent speakers of *Kanienkeha*. At the Mohawk Language Standardisation Conference in Tyendinaga in 1993, a written form of *Kanienkeha* was agreed upon⁷.

3.1 Assimilation through education

To understand why education becomes an important part in revitalizing and preserving indigenous knowledge and culture, we must consider the history of the assimilation policy and the experiences made by people through residential schools and forced assimilation.

The U.S. government's policy towards Native Americans can be put into five periods. 1) *Separation*. Natives were to be removed from their land. 2) *Coercive assimilation*. Euro-American people wanted to replace Native ways in exchange of their own ways, and to help them become self-sufficient farmers under 'white' dictation. 3) *Tribal restoration* phase 1. 'White' people encouraged Natives to maintain their tribal existence. 4) *Termination*. To break off all relationships of protection and assistance with the federal government; and 5) *Tribal restoration* phase 2. Tribal corporate adaptation to American society was again encouraged and cultural choice was reaffirmed (Spicer 1982:176).

From the 18th Century onward, the United States government tried to handle what they saw as the "Indian Problem" in many ways. Seeking for a "final solution", they found that a long-term policy was needed. There were "Three courses of action possible: outright extermination, self-determination, and assimilation" (Adams 1974:4). The first was not acceptable from a Christian point of view, the second would "admit to the inherent worth of Indian cultures, an unacceptable admission for a society convinced of its own inherent superiority. Thus forced assimilation was to be regarded as the final solution. Moreover, a primary tool in the assimilation process was to be education" (ibid). During the period 1865 to 1900 the federal authorities made several agreements with different protestant churches to establish schools in the reservations. The missionaries and other non-Natives who came to the reservations had one thing in common: "All viewed themselves as agents of a superior civilization to an inferior one. All viewed the tribal cultures with which they came in contact as being savage, and therefore, deserving of extinction" (Adams 1974:4).

⁷ <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/mohawk.htm>

Throughout the century, though, attitudes started to change. In 1924 Congress granted citizenship to all Native Americans, and a new position emerged, that Natives should not be coerced into discarding their cultural traditions, a position embodied in the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934. The IRA recognized the rights of Natives to their own local government on the reservations. It also encouraged freedom of choice in religion and other aspects of life. In the 1970s the trend was to affirm and develop further the provisions of the IRA, and in 1975 came the passage known as the Indian Self-Determination Act (Spicer 1982).

3.1.2 The residential school era

The American government took the responsibility of educating the Native people on the east coast in agreements signed December 2., 1794, and this is when the Bureau of Indian Affairs became involved⁸. In the period 1810-1917, mission schools were subsidized by the U.S. government, and in the 1860s a federal school system for Native Americans was established. In 1930 almost ninety percent of all Native children were enrolled in school. Approximately half of them attended public school, a little over a third of them were in schools operated by the Indian Bureau, and almost ten percent were in private or mission schools (Szasz 1999: 2). These statistics turned out to be misleading, though, since although many children started school, a large proportion of them dropped out. The Bureau of Indian Affairs was encouraged by these conditions to reform, and the climax was reached in 1928 with the publication of ‘The Problem of Indian Administration’, more commonly known as the Meriam Report. The report was used as a guideline, but it was not again recognized by the Congress and the Bureau until the 1960s, when they realized that many of the problems mentioned in the report were still uncorrected. The Meriam Report suggested that education should be the primary function of the Indian Bureau. It advised that Native education be geared for all age levels and that it be tied in closely with the community.

The first off-reservation Native American boarding school, the Carlisle Indian School, was founded in Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1879. Boarding schools were an important part of the U.S. government’s policy of attempting to assimilate its Native population into mainstream culture. The idea behind this policy was to “kill the Indian to save the man”. By placing “the savage-born infant into the surroundings of civilization”,

⁸ The Bureau of Indian Affairs was established in 1824 under the name Office of Indian Affairs. Before that, similar agencies have existed in the U.S. since 1775 under various names.

he would “grow to possess a civilized language and habit” (Prucha 1990). Native children were removed from their families and communities to be assimilated into the dominant culture. The boarding schools were designed to physically, ideologically, and emotionally remove Indian children from their families, homes, and tribal affiliation. The students could not ‘be Native’ in any way, culturally, artistically, spiritually, or linguistically. Prior to World War Two, many public schools didn’t allow Native students, making boarding schools the only option available. Some parents chose to send their children to a boarding school, because they wanted them to get an education, while other children were sent to these schools against their and their family’s will; the individual stories are many, and diverse. Carlisle was the first school of its kind, but within a few years, the government began building large, off-reservation boarding schools across the United States. After World War Two, education became more accessible to Native people, and in the 1980s many boarding schools were closed (ibid.).

After Franklin Roosevelt became President of the United States in 1933, he appointed John Collier as the leader of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1934, as a part of the ‘New Deal’. During the same year, Collier provided funds for tribes to purchase new land, he offered government recognition of tribal constitutions, and repealed prohibitions on Native American customs and languages. Federal grants were provided to local school districts, hospitals, and social welfare agencies to assist Native Americans. Collier emphasized that Native Americans should be allowed to practice their own ceremonies and religion. They should neither be forced to participate in the worship and Christian services in the boarding schools, nor be punished for practicing their own religion. Collier also meant that the Native children should be given the possibility to live at home and participate in day-schools, rather than spend ten months a year away from home. With Collier, there was a change in attitude and goals in the government toward Native Americans. “(...) a shift in education goals from white-collar to agrarian ideas, from routine grammar school to community school ideas, from a ban on native Indian culture to its encouragement and utilization while emphasizing technical and professional training” (Roland 1989:200). Now, the Natives’ own culture was to be acknowledged and given more actual and useful training on the agrarian way of life. Under President Nixon, Native Americans were given possibilities of self-determination; his goal was to strengthen the Natives’ self-governing.

The ‘Indian Reorganization Act’ has been celebrated as a good part of U.S. politics, but it has also been criticized as “social engineering” to “(...) manipulate Indian

behaviour in ways which their white ‘guardians’ thought best for them” (Wub-e-ke-niew; Blake Jr., Francis 1992⁹)

The assimilation policy had a lasting and devastating impact on Native peoples in America, and in some areas, and for some people, the policy to eradicate “Indianness”, was successful. In the end though, as many can confirm, the goal of cultural genocide failed; Native American people, families, communities, and cultures have survived. Former student Ruthie Blalock Jones (Delaware/Shawnee/Peoria) said of the schools, “They were started to stamp out the Indian from the Indian, you know, make us all into white people, and you know, it didn’t work. Actually...it was the exact opposite: It made us stronger as Indian people. It made us more aware of and more proud of who we were” (Heard Museum 1999 in Archuleta et al. (eds.) 2000).

The painful experiences under the United States’ policy of assimilation were the background for the Native American claim of self-determination. The three principles of the self-determination movement were (Adams 1974:4-5):

1. The issue of curriculum. Self-determinists argued that the curriculum should reflect the Indian culture and values.
2. The Indian schools should be responsive to the needs of the local community and preferably give room for local involvement in the educational programs.
3. Indian schools should be run by Indians.

3.2 Cultural revitalization

The early nineteenth-century traditionalism is said to have started with the Seneca visionary Handsome Lake. Handsome Lake- *Kaniatario*, was born in 1735 in a Seneca town by the Genesee River, and later became a chief of the Turtle Clan. He had severe drinking problems, and one day he fell to the earth and was given the Death Ceremony. During the ceremony, it is said, he suddenly stood up, he “Came to life”, and thus became a prophet and a teacher. While seemingly dead, three messengers from the Great Spirit had come to him, he told the people. The messengers said that the Creator had chosen him to tell the Iroquois People how they should live and worship. Several times during the next years, he received more messages while in a trance. The most important message was to condemn the use of “the white man’s firewater”, that it was sent over to America

⁹ http://www.maquah.net/AhnishinahbaeotjibwayReflections/1992/1992-07-31_Wub-e-ke-niew_column.html

by the Evil Spirit to destroy the Native Americans. Handsome Lake urged people to follow the Native customs and government. He said that the really great man is not the man who gains for himself wealth and power, but the man who does the most for his people. He told the Council of Chiefs that in order to protect their country and people from the white man that it was necessary that some of the young people went away to white schools to educate themselves in the white man's business methods, and then return to Native lands to help their own. Handsome lake preached the *Kariwiiio* religion for sixteen years, before he died at Onondaga in 1815 (Indian Time 2004:22). The religion is known as 'The Code of Handsome Lake', and parts of it were eventually incorporated into the Longhouse religion.

Some modern traditionalists reject The Code of Handsome Lake as being influenced by the American great religious awakenings in the seventeen and eighteen hundreds. They follow the teachings of the Peacemaker and the Great Law, and think that some of Handsome Lake's teachings contradict The Great Law. Scholars have characterized the Handsome Lake movement as a revitalization movement. Wallace defines revitalization movements as "deliberate, conscious, organized efforts by members of a society to create a more satisfying culture" (Wallace 1956:279). Wallace characterizes Handsome Lake's movement as revivalistic, but also mildly 'nativistic', as it places strong emphasis on the elimination of alien persons, customs, values, and/or material from the mazeway.

3.2.1 Revitalization and symbolism in Akwesasne

The cultural revitalization in Akwesasne and other Mohawk communities is considered to have started in the last half of the 19th Century. Black ash splint and sweetgrass baskets, beadwork, snowshoes, cradleboards, etc. became popular tourist commodities, and make up the basis for local industries even today. The Native game Lacrosse -*Tewaarathon*, also attracted non-Natives' attention. By adapting the old ways to a new world, the Mohawks avoided complete assimilation and were able to preserve and revitalize tradition and cultural emblems. Around the turn of the century, the 19th to the 20th, many Mohawk men started working in the high-steel construction industry around the United States and Canada. Mohawk men were rumored to never be afraid of heights, and were sought after in the industry as being good ironworkers. Buildings like the Empire State Building, the World Trade Center, Sears Tower, and the Golden Gate are some of the

structures that Mohawk ironworkers worked on. The high wages from construction work also helped the economy in Mohawk communities ¹⁰.

In the 1940s a young teacher named Ray Fadden came to Akwesasne. He wanted to nurture Mohawk nationalism in Akwesasne, and took young people on trips to show them *Haudenosaunee* historic sites, teaching them about wampum belts, etc. He also published pamphlets etc. that countered the stereotypic image of Native Americans from the film industry and school textbooks. Many of his students became traditional leaders (ibid.). Also in the 1940s, Akwesasne got its own newspaper, *Kawehras!* (“It thunders!”), and later ‘Akwesasne Notes’ in the late 60s. In 1984 the local radio station CKON-FM¹¹ aired for the first time.

Although Akwesasne seems rather peaceful, there are noticeable tensions present. Much of this is based on internal disagreements concerning casinos and gambling. The tax laws on reservations allow the existence of casinos, a business that has proved to be popular and economically rewarding for many people. The downside to the casino business, though, is numerous cases of gambling addiction, violence and dissatisfaction in the communities. In some reservations the money earned by the owners of the casinos are handed out to the inhabitants, but in others the community members never see these money or feel that the casinos are contributing to the community in a positive way. In Akwesasne, the traditional and the elected councils disagree on this matter; whether the money earned from the casinos and the work opportunities they provide is worth the social problems that come with it. This was also a part of the problem during the ‘Gaming Wars’, also referred to as the Civil War in 1989-90, where two men were killed, and that left scars in the community that can still be felt today. Members of the Warrior Society, who supports the casinos, and opponents of gambling, along with the Canadian police, fought across the barricades in Akwesasne. This conflict (cf.4.5) is an important context when looking at the situation in Akwesasne today.

People in Akwesasne express their identity as Mohawks in many different ways, as all people do. Still, there are some symbols or expressions that seem to be frequently used. Many traditionalist men have long hair, loose or braided. This is by Native Americans traditions a sign of one’s connection to the Creator. To cut off one’s hair is to sever the connection to the Creator. It symbolizes that one does not have a clear mind, and was traditionally done by men who fought in wars, because they did not want to

¹⁰ <http://www.wampumchronicles.com/history.html>

¹¹ CKON is a reference to the Mohawk greeting “she:kon”.

bring the Creator to the battlefield. After they returned, they would usually grow their hair long again. Due to colonization, the long hairstyle mostly disappeared along with many other Native symbols and culture traits. Many of these, along with the long hair, came back, though, during the Native pride movements in the 1970s (Preston 2004). Some men cut their hair short on the side and keep it longer on top of the head - what in mainstream American society is often referred to as a 'Mohawk' hairstyle. For ceremonies and other festive occasions, men and women often wear ribbon shirts and dresses, the traditional Iroquoian clothing, and some wear moccasins - especially when dancing in the Longhouse or at socials.¹² Many wear t-shirts or sweaters with cultural references like the Confederacy flag etc. Some wear jewellery with symbols like the Medicine Wheel, their clan animal, or other cultural references. The colors white and purple, which are the colors of the wampum belts and the *Haudenosaunee* Confederacy flag, are frequently used in clothes and jewellery, as well as in black ash and sweetgrass baskets.

The Confederacy flag and the Warriors flag can be observed in several locations in Akwesasne. I heard people express frustration when the two flags were placed together, as some think the message in them contradict each other, while others do not agree that they do. Many of my traditionalist informants generally avoid the things that are causing problems in Akwesasne, like alcohol, smoking, gambling, etc. The smugglers in Akwesasne often wear big gold necklaces and buy big houses, cars and boats with the money they get from smuggling. Most smugglers are caught at some point, as these signs are also observed by the police.

In general, it seems that on a day-to-day basis as Native amongst Native people, symbols of a Native ethnic and cultural identity are not over-communicated. Many Mohawks in Akwesasne also do not see themselves first and foremost as Mohawk, many identify themselves as Catholic first, and Mohawk after. At pow wow's or other cultural events, symbolism becomes a different matter, though. The pow-wow context is a place where many of the visitors and dancers wear plenty of symbols like traditional clothing, jewellery, t-shirts, etc. In a reservation like Akwesasne, the contact and potential conflict people have with non-Natives may often be in the form of the state or government, and not so much with members of other ethnic groups on a day-to-day basis. Thus it may not

¹² In the longhouse one is supposed to wear soft-soled shoes that do not make noise, out of respect for the Creator's ceremonial house. Children (and adults) are not allowed to run around, shout, or play loudly, for the same reason.

feel essential for some people to express their ethnic identity, as others feel it is. One of my key informants said that people used to be more involved in political debates, demonstrations, etc., but that after the conflict of 89-90, many are afraid of expressing their political views “too loudly”, because they are afraid of the consequences.

Lacrosse was originally a Native American sport, although played by teams all over the world today. The English-French name is believed to have originated from the sticks’ resemblance to a bishop’s crosier. In Mohawk the game is called *Tewaarathon*, which means “little brother of war”. In the old days, a lacrosse game was a matter of training young men for war or as a means of conflict resolution. Today it is a peaceful, yet fast-paced game that is played outside with ten players on each side, or inside with six players on each side. Lacrosse is also known as “the Creator’s fun game”. Although, or maybe because, lacrosse is played all over the world, it is recognized as a Native game and is in a way and for some, an emblem of *Onkwehonwe*¹³ identity.

In this chapter I have given a short introduction and overview of the historical background of the Mohawk and *Haudenosaunee* people. I have also looked at the assimilation policy in the residential school era, as well as given an introduction to the Mohawk revitalization movement and some examples of cultural symbols observed in Akwesasne. I will now address the political framework for Mohawk traditionalism in Akwesasne,

¹³ *Onkwehonwe* means “the Original People”. It refers to indigenous peoples in general, and Native Americans specifically.

4.0 Politics of Decolonization

The *Haudenosaunee* political structure is well known as a complex and democratic system, and is also said to have influenced other democratic constitutions. It provides a strong basis of identity for traditional members of the *Haudenosaunee* nations, and thus for the Akwesasne Freedom School and the community of Kanatsiohareke.

4.1 The political structure of the *Haudenosaunee*

The initial basis for the political structure of the Mohawk is the clan system, by which relations are formed and defined. Conflict is ideally avoided amongst the *Haudenosaunee*, by the message of the Great Law of Peace as introduced by *Deganawida* - 'the Peacemaker', and the clan system.

Iroquoian clans are the basis of traditional structures of relations, of mutual support, of decision-making and dispute-resolution. These structures emphasize consensus, clarity of thought and communication, and the healing of loss and other emotions that render hearing impossible (Jocks 2004:141).

Clan relations are connected to the same values of respect and reciprocity that Longhouse people consider to characterize the rest of Creation. Clan membership is inherited from the mother, in a matrilineal kinship system. Members of the same clan are considered family, and should always take care of each other and give each other shelter. A Mohawk who belongs to the Wolf Clan is considered a brother to for instance an Oneida who is Wolf Clan, etc. This also extends to other peoples, so if a Mohawk travels to for instance Hopi land, he would look for a member of the same clan, as they would take care of him as family. In *Haudenosaunee* longhouses, the Bear, Deer, Snipe, and Eel clans form a moiety - *skanonhsakará:ti*, they sit together on the same side of the house, as do the Wolf, Beaver, Turtle and Hawk clans on the opposite side (Porter 2008:100).¹⁴ Since they are part of one's extended family, one should never marry someone of one's own clan.

The *Haudenosaunee* nations have nine clans: Heron, Hawk, Snipe, Bear, Wolf, Deer, Turtle, Beaver and Eel. The Mohawk have three of these: Bear, Wolf, and Turtle. Members of other clans from Oneida, Onondaga and Cayuga moved to Akwesasne in times of need, and thus some people of other clans like Snipe, Deer and Eel also live in

¹⁴ The clans with only a few members in Akwesasne, like the Snipe, Eel, and Deer clans, sometimes change sides in the Longhouse, depending on how many are seated on each side. During the summer of 2007, the Snipe and Deer clans sat with the Bear clan. People without a clan and visitors sit on the side they are invited to sit on, or the one with the fewest people.

Akwesasne today. Each clan give their members certain personality traits, and each clan has specific names that belong to the clan. When a baby is born, the father should be the first person to speak to the baby. He speaks in Mohawk, introducing the newborn to the Creator and naming the baby. When Iroquois people talk to the Creator, they present themselves with their Mohawk name, if they have one, and their clan. Clan belonging is important for many Mohawks, and is often symbolized through jewellery, interior decoration, etc.

The Mohawk Nation has nine Clanmothers, the *Kontiianehson*. They are the head women of a large extended family within each clan. The Clanmothers are responsible of selecting, or deposing, a *Roia:ne*, a male leader. A *Roia:ne* is selected in a democratic process, first chosen by his Clanmothers, then approved by his clan, then brought before the Mohawk Council, the Grand Council, and then approved by the people. A *Roia:ne* is in position until he is removed ('de-horned'), or passes away.

“In the human body, the bones are what give the body structure and the ability to function. The clan serves the same purpose in the societies of the Rotinonhsón:ni people” (Porter 2008:97).

Kaianerekowa - The Great Law of Peace

The Six Nations are known for their political system which has inspired many indigenous peoples all over the world. The political philosophy of the *Haudenosaunee* is expressed in the Great Law of Peace, which describes a great tree with roots extending in the four directions to all peoples of the Earth. Everyone is invited to follow the roots to the tree and join in peaceful coexistence under its leaves. The Mohawk Nation was the first to accept the Great Law of Peace when the Peacemaker traveled from community to community to talk about the Law. This is reflected in the three feathers the Mohawks wear in their headdress, their *Kastowah*.

The Great Law of Peace promotes unity among individuals, families, clans, and nations while upholding the integrity of diverse identities and spheres of autonomy (Anaya 2004). At the core of the Great Law is a fundamental idea that human beings with a Good Mind would naturally seek and maintain peace. A “Good Mind” means to both use one’s mind rationally and to its true potential, and to use one’s mind for those purposes which are morally righteous, which results in being socially beneficial (Porter 2006:7).

The Great Law of Peace is believed to be at least one thousand years old. It was initiated by a man called *Deganawida* – ‘the Peacemaker’, who was sent by the Creator, it is said, in a time of unrest to talk to people about Peace, Power and Righteousness. If you integrate these things into your mind you will have no fear, but always happiness, and everyone will respect you, he told them. This meant that you should have *ka’nikonhrí:io* - a Good Mind: a peaceful and powerful mind. The Peacemaker, along with his helper *Aiionwatha*, taught the people to structure the Longhouse by clans, and said that the bloodline should follow the women, because they create life. The women shall decide who are to be leaders, they are charged with making the decisions concerning the future of the land (Kalant 2004).

The Great Law is very intricate and complex. The core of the Law is the Council of fifty Chiefs, to which the Six Nations send delegates – *Roia:ne*¹⁵ to. The Clanmothers, who may also remove them of their duties if they find it necessary, choose the *Roia:ne*. The League itself is seen as a giant Longhouse, where the Senecas guard the Western door, the Mohawks guard the Eastern door, and the Onondaga guard the fire in the middle. Every Chief is a tree or a pole that strengthens the structure of the building. The Great Law is symbolized by the Wampum belts, which are beaded belts made out of the Quahog shell, with intricate patterns that tells a story or an agreement. They are handed on by the Wampum Keepers, who are picked out and taught to remember the message of the belts (Wilson 1998:148f). One of the best known wampum belts is the “Hiawatha Belt” or the Five Nations Peace Belt, which is used as the Confederacy flag. Another wampum belt is a recording of an agreement made in 1613 between the *Haudenosaunee* and the Dutch, a basis for all subsequent treaties with North American and European governments. The wampum belt is known as *Guswhenta* - the Two Row Wampum. It shows two purple lines running parallel, one represents a *Haudenosaunee* canoe and the other a European ship, traveling down the river of life together, but never touching. This represent an agreement where neither society will interfere in internal affairs or force laws upon the other, an agreement that many Iroquois people still think should form the basis of their relationship.

¹⁵ *Roia:ne* means ‘Man of the Good Mind’, and refers to qualities that are expected and assigned to these men. The *Roia:ne* must be married and supportive of his wife and a good father. He must be a member of his Clanmother’s clan, and his father’s clan must be different from his mother’s clan. He must be fluent in the Mohawk language, and he must be knowledgeable of the beliefs and political structure. He must be an honest and truthful person, kind, patient and caring. He has to carry a mature good mind at all times, and be a righteous person. A *Roia:ne* is automatically removed if he commits one of the following crimes: murder, rape or stealing (Indian Time 2004: 11).

The Peacemaker also taught the *Haudenosaunee* about the Ceremonies, and about giving thanks for all things. In the Longhouse religion people should not ask for things when talking to the Creator, but say thanks for what has already been given. The *Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen* -“The Words that Come Before All Else”, or the Thanksgiving Address, is recited when giving thanks to the Creation.

Today, a group of people from an organization named the Tree of Peace Society execute a journey known as the ‘Peacemaker’s Journey’. This group travels in the footsteps of the Peacemaker, and makes the message available to more people.

The Longhouse

Haudenosaunee means ‘The People of the Longhouse’. The name refers to the traditional way of living, in longhouses in which as many as hundred people belonging to the same clan would live. The men would move to their wife’s clan’s house. The longhouse was a one-story building covered in bark from beech and with a barrel-shaped roof. Over the entrance the clan’s totem animal would be carved. When the population grew, the building would be extended to fit more people. Today the Longhouse is, physically, a building that is used for the Ceremonies, weddings, social gatherings, etc. It has entrances on both ends; the women enter from one side, the men from the opposite side. Inside there are benches alongside the walls, and the building is heated by two wood-burning stoves in the center of the room. Next to the longhouse there is a smaller building where food is prepared and eaten, known as the cookhouse.

The Ceremonial Cycle of the year is based on a horticultural way of life. The ceremonies show a deep respect and feeling of reciprocity for life embedded in the seasons, sky, and soil. There is danger in this mutual dependency as well, but skill, attention and good-mindedness can make human life both rich and sustainable. The Ceremonial Cycle is: Midwinter, Dead Feast, Tobacco Burning, Maple Tree, Thunder Dance, Medicine Mask, Seed-Planting, Strawberry, Raspberry, Beans, Green Corn, Harvest, Thunder Dance, Dead Feast, and End of Season¹⁶.

The Longhouse also represents a group of people who follow the Mohawk teachings and traditions. They are often referred to as ‘Longhouse people’. Not everyone who wants to preserve the tradition is necessarily Longhouse. To be ‘Longhouse’ is individually defined, but definitions often include qualities like supporting the

¹⁶ <http://pages.slic.com/mohawkna/curricul.htm>

Confederacy, supporting the traditional form of government, preferably speaking the language, going to ceremonies in the Longhouse, living by the Teachings, have a Mohawk name etc. The term ‘Longhouse’ describes an ethic of reciprocity and consensus that governs the spiritual, social and political life of the people. Today, the term generally refers to a group of people who adhere to a process in which spirituality, ethics, and politics are united, and for whom power is diffused rather than centralized in a particular individual or group of individuals, in accordance with historic League practices.

The Longhouse religion or cosmology¹⁷ connects the people and the rest of the Creation together; animals, spirits, natural resources, etc. It is said by Longhouse people that even if there are no people left to remember the ceremonies, the animals and the plants will know them, and they will continue to live on. The ceremonies guide the way for the people in how to live their lives. Today’s Longhouse ceremonies are connected to the consciousness of forebears who depended only on the nutritional and spiritual resources of the forests of northeastern North America. “This consciousness is animated by intensified experiences through which relationships with the other-than-human entities of the forest were, and to some extent still are, established and maintained, bringing the power to know and the power to heal to the human community. The rites of the so-called Medicine Societies include the cultivation of individual experiences that continues to enact this consciousness” (Jocks 2004:141). The best-known Medicine Society to many non-Natives is the False Face Society, known for their dramatic wooden masks that are representations of spirits. They are used during healing rituals throughout the year, where they relieve people and homes of illness and evil spirits.

In Akwesasne, members of the Warrior Society are using a second longhouse. This is the longhouse that was previously used in the community, but the ‘fire’¹⁸ was moved from this one to the present longhouse. In traditionalists’ beliefs, the spiritual strength of the old house is gone, it has been moved to the new one. This is not the opinion of the Warriors who use it today, thus it has become a place for them to practice their beliefs.

The Grand Council of the *Haudenosaunee*

The Six Nations have altogether fifty chiefs that meet in the Grand Council. Each nation is represented differently; the Mohawks have nine chiefs, the Oneidas nine, the Onondaga

¹⁷ Many Native people insist that they have no “religion”, because the term has no relevance in their understanding of what they do (Jocks in Olupona 2004:146).

¹⁸ “The Fire” refers to the energy center, a spiritual presence and strength.

fourteen, the Cayugas ten, the Senecas eight, and the Tuscaroras none, since they joined the Confederacy many years after the others.

The meetings of The Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee are held for serious matters that concern all the Six Nations. The issue is first presented to the Onondaga Nation, who decides whether it requires a Grand Council meeting. Each nation has its own Council of Chiefs, which deals with each nation's problems, and sometimes the Grand Council will send the issue back to them. When an important issue is to be discussed, the Grand Council sends runners with wampum to invite the Chiefs of the Confederacy to the meeting. At the meeting, the Onondaga present the issue to the Elder Brothers; the Senecas and the Mohawks. When the Elder Brothers have reached a decision, their spokesman stands up and "throws or tosses the issue across the fire", meaning they tell the Younger Brothers their decision. After the Younger Brothers discuss the matter, and then "throw the issue back across the fire" to the Elder Brothers. If the Younger and the Elder Brothers reach the same decision, they inform the Onondagas of their agreement. The Onondagas then discuss the decision again and consider the cultural values and laws of the Haudenosaunee. If all is in balance, the Onondaga announce the decision. If there is disagreement, an issue can be discussed three times before it is determined that more information should be found before a decision is made (Indian Time 2004)

4.2 Local Politics in Akwesasne

At first, Akwesasne looks like any American town, with a main road that runs through the community, with smaller roads and houses scattered alongside them. When you look closer, though, you see signs like "Kanienkehaka Fuels", "The Eastern Door Convenience Store", "Chiefs Tobacco Outlet and Gas", etc. Some places you can see the Confederacy flag, also known as "Hiawatha's Belt", and other places the Warrior flag. Occasionally you can see writings on walls or signs alongside the road that express political messages, like "This is Mohawk land, not NYS [New York State] land!!!", and "No, no tax on our damn land!". Even though Akwesasne is located close to the Adirondack Mountains, the landscape is mostly flat. The St. Lawrence River runs from east to west through Akwesasne, and forms the official international border between the United States and Canada. Cornwall Island is located in the middle of the river, and forms the northern border of Akwesasne. Two large bridges connect the island to the

mainland on both sides of the riverbank. On the northern shore lies the Canadian city of Cornwall. There are also many smaller islands in the river that are part of the Akwesasne territory.

In *Kanienkeh*, Akwesasne means “The land where the Partridge Drums”. It is with its about 13000 people the largest Mohawk community, and thus considered to be the “capital” of the Mohawk territories. Mohawk people used the area around the St.Lawrence River as fishing and hunting grounds for thousands of years, due to all the waterways in the area. In the 1750s Jesuit Priests established a mission by the St.Regis River, to relieve the Kahnawake reservation, which had become crowded. This became known as St.Regis, or Akwesasne. More people moved up from the Mohawk Valley during a troubled time in the mid-1700s, after the “French and Indian War” between France and England (1754-1763). Also, refugees from Oswegatchie Mission came to Akwesasne at this time. In 1796 a six square mile tract and some collateral land were reserved for the Mohawks, in return for their promise to abandon any further land claims in New York State. During the American Revolutionary War in 1775-1783, about 1500 Iroquois warriors fought on both sides of the conflict. Generally speaking, the Tuscarora and Oneida sided with the Americans, and the Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca sided with the English. When the American side won, the Mohawks were moved up to Akwesasne for fighting for the ‘wrong’ side.

Akwesasne is a practicing matrilineal society; the women strongly influence the political and social structures of society. The Clanmothers elect the chiefs and Faithkeepers, and the women’s opinions are in general highly respected in everyday life. Akwesasne has a traditional Council: the Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs, and two elected bodies: the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne on the Canadian side, and the St.Regis Mohawk Tribe on the U.S. side. The members of the elected councils are voted for in the community with formalized elections. The Mohawk Council of Akwesasne administers programs of education, police services, social services, economics, environment, health, housing, justice, etc. The St.Regis Mohawk Tribe administers its own environmental, social, policing, economic, health and educational programs, policies, laws and regulations¹⁹. The United States and Canada governments deal exclusively with the elected councils, while the Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs is recognized by the *Haudenosaunee* Confederacy as the official government of the Mohawk people.²⁰ This

¹⁹ <http://srmt-nsn.gov/his.htm>

²⁰ <http://www.mohawknation.org/>

poses a divide in the population of Akwesasne; many traditionalist people do not support the existence of the elected councils, as they consider them to be too inspired by the Euro-American way of governing a society. In many Mohawk communities, included Akwesasne, there is a presence of a nationalist group called The Warrior Society, most commonly known as “The Warriors”. This group has been defined and viewed in a variety of ways, from the inside and outside, as Amelia Kalant sums up: “as neotraditionalists, as ardent supporters of sovereignty, as defenders of Mohawk land, as misguided and angry young men, as a group of criminals and para-military enthusiasts who use the languages of tradition and nationalism to protect lucrative gambling and cigarette-trading, as profiteers more concerned with individual accumulation than their community, as misguided subscribers to European, state-oriented nationalism etc.” (Kalant 2004:12). Traditionally, the Warrior Society was a group of men who, before the Great Law of Peace, gathered to fight and defend against enemies; after the introduction of the Great Law ideally only to defend and protect the people.

The contemporary Warrior Society emerged in the late 1960s, and became especially visible in 1987 in Kahnawake during the debates over gambling. The Warriors are traditionalists, but with a different approach than Longhouse traditionalists. In Mohawk, there is not a word for warrior; the men are called *Hodiskengehdah*, which means ‘all the men who carry the bones, the burden of their ancestors, on their backs’ (Johansen 1993:66). The Mohawk Warrior Society was established by a group of young people committed to reviving traditional *Kanien’kehaka* teachings, language and structures in *Kanien’kehaka* territories. Accordingly, the strategy and tactics employed by the Mohawk Warrior Society are community and/or land based. The overall strategy was to repossess and protect *Kanien’kehaka* territories according to the *Kaianerakowa*, the Great Law of Peace. The tactics employed by the Mohawk Warrior Society included barricades and roadblocks (to prevent Canadian and U.S. authorities from entering *Kanien’kehaka* territories), evictions (of unwanted people living in *Kanien’kehaka* reserve lands) and occupations (repossession of lands within *Kanien’kehaka* territory) (Alfred, Lowe 2005).

There is still some tension between the anti-gamblers and the Warriors in Akwesasne, one of my informants said “We tolerate each other, but the tension is still right underneath the surface”. She worried whenever she saw young boys with Warrior symbols on their clothes. These boys are too young to remember the war in 89-90, and many of them do not know exactly what the symbols mean, she said. Another of my

informants, an anti-gambler who stood on the barricades during the civil war and was almost killed by members of the Warrior Society, told me about a situation where he had seen his nephew wearing the Warrior flag on his clothes. Many families were split during the war and after, but in this situation the nephew removed the flag when his uncle told him about what happened during the war, since he had not known what it represented. Some people see it as a good sign that the younger generations do not know the meaning, because it means that people have started to forget the negativity and fighting that characterized the community in the time around 1990. One of my key informants told me, though, that she had talked to some young Warrior men whom she had heard were training with weapons. They explained that they wanted to be ready in case of invasion. When she asked “invasion by whom?”, they repeated that they just wanted to be ready, just in case. My informant was sad that they felt the need to use weapons, because “solving things with weapons completely contradicts the Great Law and everything we’ve learned”.

Since Akwesasne is located on the border, smuggling of liquor, cigarettes, drugs, and guns has become a big problem. The smuggling has, combined with gambling, contributed to problems such as abuse of alcohol and other substances, along with violence (ibid.). Alcohol abuse is also a big problem in Akwesasne, an *Akwesasneron* I talked to estimated that around ninety percent of the families in Akwesasne are on some level dealing with alcohol problems. The smuggling has also contributed to violence, murders and hijackings on the roads and waterways around Akwesasne. Smuggling, along with the duty-free sale of cigarettes and gasoline, and gambling has divided the community and the traditional and elected governments.

For the residents of Akwesasne, crossing the border is an everyday activity. The border between Canada and USA was put through Akwesasne in 1783, and the Jay Treaty of 1794 was meant to secure the rights of Native Americans to cross the border between the United States and Canada freely. It was pointed out to me that the Jay Treaty is a *confirmation* of the right to travel freely, but it could never *allow* people to cross through their own land. Article III of the Jay Treaty says:

“It is agreed that at all Times be free to His Majesty’s Subjects, and to the Citizens of the United States, and also to the Indians dwelling on either side of said Boundary Line freely to pass and re-pass by Land, or Inland Navigation, into the respective Territories and Countries of the Two Parties on the Continent of

America (the Country within the Limits of the Hudson's Bay Company only excepted) and to navigate all the Lakes, Rivers and waters thereof, and freely to carry on trade and commerce with each other..." (21)

The Jay Treaty only applies for people "with at least fifty percent Indian blood", and so residents of Akwesasne and other communities without tribal membership must stop to show ID every time they pass the border.

According to U.S. federal law, Native Americans must pay federal income taxes unless they have signed a treaty or statute gives them an exemption. Akwesasne residents do not have to pay state income tax on income earned within the reservation, property tax, sales tax, real estate tax or inheritance tax (Indian Times 2004).

4.3 Environmental degradation

It is agreed upon in Akwesasne by traditionalists and others that the degradation of the environment and the loss of a sustaining land base is a big part of the problems found in the community today. Farming and fishing industries are not sustainable due to pollution, and the lack of other sustainable industries has given way for the smuggling industry.

To understand what is happening in general in Akwesasne today and what has been going on for the past twenty-thirty years, it is important to look at the environmental situation. Iroquois people consider themselves environmentalists by culture and tradition, a tradition that is based on giving thanks to nature and Mother Earth and to make sure that people take care of it and appreciate it. North America is known as "Turtle Island", and thus the many turtles found in Akwesasne that are full of toxins become a striking metaphor for the poisoning of the community. When looking at the environmental situation in Akwesasne today, it is evident why this is a very painful reality to witness for the Mohawks people, and also a basis for other problems in Akwesasne. "If we are to heal the divisions and the crisis at Akwesasne, we first must deal with the environment", said elected chief Harold Tarbell in the mid-90s (Johansen 1993:19).

Akwesasne is said to be one of the most polluted areas in the U.S., and the most polluted reservation in Canada (Johansen 1993:1). There are at least three big sources of serious pollution located in the area around Akwesasne: the General Motors and Alcoa

²¹ <http://www.akwesasne.ca/jaytreaty.html>

factories, and the Saint Lawrence Seaway²². Poisonous substances have contaminated fish in the rivers, forest animals, and farm animals with toxins like PCBs, etc, and entered the ground water of the region. This has made agriculture unsafe, both the cattle and fishing industry in Akwesasne is ruined, and thus the traditional economy. These environmental problems are sources for intense frustration and demonstrations by the inhabitants of Akwesasne, and others in the area. In most areas of Akwesasne people cannot drink the water or till the soil. The residents are advised not to eat more than two fish a month that were caught in the rivers in the area, and mothers are advised not to breast feed their infants. The pollution from the factories has entered the soil, ground water and the people themselves. In some forms, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) cause miscarriages, liver damage and several forms of cancer.

The environmental crisis became evident in the 1980s, when scientists began intensive testing of the area, though farmers in the area had suffered for years. Cattle suffered from fluoride poisoning, which made them lose their teeth, it weakened their bones and many cows died while giving birth. In the 1980s, the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne filed a \$150 million lawsuit against Alcoa, but settled for \$650,000. Lawsuits against the factories have been going on for years, and were still unsettled during my fieldwork. When I asked people how the pollution affected their lives, they often talked about the traditional hunting and fishing that is now impossible, and the disappearing knowledge connected to it. Young people today may know about these things in theory, but do not know exactly how to do it themselves since they rarely or never have the opportunity to try. Also, the many diseases caused by pollution in Akwesasne are obviously a very painful consequence.

4.4 Perspectives on decolonization

In this thesis I look at my case studies in relation to indigenous peoples' position in a "post-colonial" world, and the process of healing the unbalance and pain in the past and the present. Native Americans, like most indigenous peoples, live today in what during the European imperialist age became a European settler society. The difference between the colonized North America, Australia and New Zealand, and for instance countries in Africa and Asia, is that the settlers/colonizers never left America. In Africa, though still strongly influenced by European culture and language in many areas, people and

²² The Saint Lawrence Seaway is a system of canals that allows vessels to travel from the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes. Very few of the employees at the factories and the St. Lawrence Seaway are from Akwesasne.

countries have in many instances gone through processes of decolonization. In North America this process of decolonization is a very difficult one, since it is highly unlikely that the descendants of European settlers, people who identify themselves as ‘Americans’ and ‘Canadians’, will ever leave.

“Colonization created a fragmentary worldview among Aboriginal peoples. By force, terror, and educational policy, it attempted to destroy the Aboriginal worldview - but failed. Instead, colonization left a heritage of jagged worldviews among Indigenous peoples. They no longer had an Aboriginal worldview, nor did they adopt a Eurocentric worldview. Their consciousness became a random puzzle that each person has to attempt to understand. (...) Aboriginal consciousness became a site of overlapping, contentious, fragmented, competing desires and values” (Little Bear 2000:84f).

Since the arrival of the European settlers in America, the Native populations have had to redefine and articulate themselves in relation to the settlers. Colonized peoples often at least partially adopt European customs and ways of living, by assimilation or by choice. Things like horses, which have played a significant part of the Plains cultures, farm equipment, new weapons, alcohol, gambling, new diseases, cars, etc. were all brought there by the colonizers, and have affected the Native peoples in positive and negative ways. What some Native people see as negative and destructive effects, are for others niches for money-making in areas like gambling and cigarette sales. There is much internal disagreement on these matters. Most Native people agree, though, that it is more or less impossible to go back to the way of life indigenous peoples led before the Europeans arrived, or to separate oneself completely from other ethnic groups. One of my informants mentioned, though, that he would like to see the Mohawk people living like the Amish²³, to better preserve and protect the culture.

Poka Laenui (Hayden F. Burgess) writes about decolonization: “Governance over a people changes only after the people themselves have sufficiently changed” (Laenui 2000:150). A people change after being influenced by another culture and colonized. Thus, to again become a sovereign people and to be recognized as a ‘nation within the nation’, it is necessary for a people to redefine themselves and to find their place in the present-day world.

²³The Amish is an Anabaptist Christian denomination founded in 1693. They originally came to the U.S. from Germany and Switzerland and are known for living in a highly traditional manner. One of the large groups of Amish, The Old Order Amish, have not adopted modern technology, electricity, etc, and dress in a traditional manner. Other groups of Amish have fewer limitations, some use electricity and cars, and can be hard to distinguish from other Euro-Americans by appearance. Close by Kanatsiowareke there are several Amish communities, and one can often see them when traveling in the area. Some Amish farms sell handmade crafts and foods.

Laenui refers to conversations with Virgilio Enriques, a native of the Philippines, who suggested different steps in the processes of colonization and decolonization. The first step of colonization is denial and withdrawal, where indigenous peoples respond to the colonizers view on the Natives as lacking culture or moral values, by gradually withdrawing from their own cultural practices. Then, destruction or eradication of any physical representations of the symbols of indigenous cultures. The third step is when the colonists label the indigenous practices as evil and denigrate, belittle, and insult any continuing practice of the indigenous culture. Then follows surface accommodation and tokenism, where the remnants of culture that has survived the previous steps are given surface accommodation, tolerated as the continuing ignorance of the Natives. The last step in colonization, according to Enriques, is that of transformation and exploitation, where what's left of the traditional indigenous culture is transformed into the dominating colonial society, and often used in commercial aspects of the mainstream, in the form of art or the use of indigenous music instruments in mainstream music. Throughout the processes of colonization, the Natives are often highly involved themselves, and sometimes even take the lead.

Laenui suggests that for a people to heal, to go through a process of decolonization, the first step is to rediscover their people's traditions and recover from colonialism. This phase is the foundation of decolonization. A person or society may enter this phase for many different reasons, but is crucial for the next steps in the process. A problem with this phase is that people are often dealing with a representation of their culture from a non-indigenous point of view. The transition between the final stage of colonialization, exploitation, and the first stage of decolonization, rediscovery and recovery, is thus a challenging one. What follows is the mourning of the loss of culture. Mourning is an essential phase in any healing process. This stage can accelerate the rediscovery of culture, or it may be expressed in anger and violence, and some people get stuck at this stage in the process, in the status as victims (Laenui 2000). For the people who move on from this stage, the next is the most crucial part of decolonization, according to Laenui. This stage is about dreaming, where possibilities are expressed, considered, debated and where dreams may be the basis for a new social order. Decolonization includes the re-evaluation of the political, social, economic, and juridical structures. At this point, people will be ready to commit to a single direction in which the society must move. When a consensus of commitment is reached, action must be taken. People chose to take action is

varied ways, from calling to reason to resorting to arms. Today, technological tools like the Internet, television, radio and newspapers are perhaps the most efficient weapons.

All the mentioned phases of colonization and decolonization are fluent and not as clear-cut and chronological as described here. In different situations, like when a people are under direct attack, phases may switch places, and the reality is usually combinations of these social changes. It is also often necessary for people and societies to revisit the previous stages. Laenui argues that it is highly necessary to consider the processes of colonization and decolonization so that indigenous peoples do not entrench deeper into the systems, values, and control put in place by the colonizer (Laenui 2000:159).

Mohawk people today find themselves at different stages in the decolonization process, if we are to consider Laenui and Enriquez' phases. Some people are stuck as victims of colonization, and do not seem to want to find their way out. Other people mourn by expressing anger and sometimes violence. A majority of the people I met in Akwesasne and Kanatsiowareke seem to be in a phase of dreaming of what may become and are planning, or executing, actions to reach a new order in society and a new place for the Mohawk Nation in present-day North America. Still, I think most individuals move between the different stages, between constantly rediscovering their ancestors culture and language, and taking action to use this in everyday life; between mourning the loss of some things, while dreaming of the future and committing to making changes. The political aspect to Kanatsiowareke and The Akwesasne Freedom School is the part where the preservation and reviving of tradition as a way of living in the present, becomes an ideology.

4.4.1 Mohawk nationalism

The Iroquois have for a long time been recognized as a people who defined themselves, and was thus seen by others, as Nations; if not by the states they live within. The term First Nations, commonly used in Canada, did not appear until the 1970s, meant to replace the term 'band' or 'Indian', which some people found offensive. Despite its widespread use there is still no legal definition of this term in Canada, though²⁴. Steven Newcomb of the Indigenous Law Institute points to how the term 'nation' contains connotations like government, territory, realm, confederacy, independent political unit, etc., while the term 'tribe' does not. 'Sovereignty' is not found in the

²⁴ http://www.aidp.bc.ca/terminology_of_native_aboriginal_metis.pdf

etymological history of the word 'tribe', while it is naturally embedded in the word 'nation'. Treaties are defined as formal agreements between states, so Newcomb questions the use of 'tribe' and 'tribal' (Newcomb 2004). Will Kymlicka (2000) writes about "nations within" or "national minorities", which are groups that formed complete and functioning societies in their historical homeland, before they were incorporated into larger states. This group includes indigenous peoples, who want to regain control over their traditional territories. Many Mohawks deny their status as a minority within the state, and often use terms like "nationality" to describe and defend their claims of autonomy. How the state treats these "nations within the nation" is an important issue today. Audra Simpson, herself a Kahnawake Mohawk, writes about everyday nationalism in the Mohawk reserve Kahnawake in present-day Canada. "(...) the culture and issues of native peoples can best be examined in terms of the lived experiences of nationhood" (Simpson 2000:126). She looks at how indigenous nationhood is understood, practised and narrated by its own people, by examining everyday nationalism. Nationalism is localized around the critical axes of 'membership' or citizenship in ones own society. The issue of membership, what the criteria should be to acquire, sustain and practice ones rights within the society, not the state, has opened up for internal discussions about the contents of identity; what is a Mohawk, what "should" a Mohawk be? These discussions point to the many ways especially indigenous peoples negotiate and construct their own boundaries around the self, the society and their rights. Mohawk nationalism is about preserving what the Mohawk Nation has now, and to guarantee a place for them in the future. It has grown from global processes of colonization, and emphasises the past, while looking towards an insecure future in dialog with the state.

Mohawks carry a consciousness about themselves as members of a nation that existed before present-day USA and Canada. The present time for Mohawks connects the modern, the colonial era and the pre-colonial era. The Culture and the Nation is self-conscious, intended and politically formulated, and are at the same time experienced and an implicit phenomenon. "Both constitute a terrain of consensus, disagreement, discord and hopeful contemplation that connects the categorical 'Mohawk' to the individual, their family and the extension of their family to a living entity: their nation" (Simpson 2000:118). Traditional Mohawks today connects the present with the past, and might therefore be said to create a 'traditionalist' ideology in a modern world, where you have a basis for an identity as part of a bigger 'nation', the Mohawk Nation. This way, people

emphasize values that cohere with what in their opinion are the “right” or “authentic” Mohawk values.

“All nations are formed through a process of marginalization – a constant pushing of others to the outskirts of economic, political and social power” (Kalant 2004: 4), Amelia Kalant says about how nations are constructed through the interplay of multiple others, through a process of differentiation and appropriation where players and conditions are reflected through each other to form the national self. Cultural homogenization is often situated as a problem of neo-colonization and imperialism, and the solution is presented as ‘sovereignty’. But homogenization and sovereignty are also part of a complex and contradictory process of nation-state and colonization, colonization has produced the discourse of cultural and national difference. Native people, when expressing the possibility of a sovereign, non-state nation, often find themselves having to negotiate specifically state-oriented, ‘European’ notions of nation and sovereignty against which they are struggling.

The gambling industry in Native communities is an example of how the issue of different definitions of cultural values and nationhood resulted in a violent divide of Akwesasne in 1989.

4.5 Commercial Gambling and the “Gaming Wars” of 1989-90

In the early 1980s, Billy’s Bingo Hall opened as the first bingo operation in Akwesasne. The owner, William Sears, contracted to turn over forty-nine percent of the profits to the St.Regis Tribal Council, the elected council that is recognized by U.S. and state governments. In 1985 the Mohawk Bingo Palace opened, and Akwesasne became a mecca for tourists. The opposition against commercial gambling also grew as the many gambling operations appeared soon after. In 1987 the Mohawk Warrior Society made its appearance in written records of the gambling dispute. The Warriors’ ideology contains an identification of gambling with Mohawk sovereignty and a penchant for identifying the Warriors’ interests with those of the Mohawk people (Johansen 1993). Traditionalists consider gambling to be destructive, while other Mohawk, included many of the state-sanctioned elected Tribal Council, insist that casinos are essential to the nation’s economic survival and sovereignty (Porter 2006:41).

In 1988 the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act was passed, establishing federal standards for gaming on Native land. Reservation gambling was to be regulated, and some of its profits were supposed to go into tribal budgets for the common good for the

inhabitants. In Akwesasne gambling was not regulated, and the profits never reached the community, but instead usually went into the pockets of the sponsors. By mid-1989 the gambling operations were the largest source of employment in Akwesasne. In 1989 nine traditional chiefs of the Mohawk Nation Council asked President George H.W. Bush to intervene and remove gambling devices from Akwesasne, a very difficult decision for the chiefs. To ask for help from the U.S. government felt like inviting intervention from the outside.

In June 1989 antigamblers started talking about blockading Route 37, the main strip for the gambling operations, to keep the clientele away. Antigamblers combined efforts into a group called Determined Residents United for Mohawk Sovereignty (DRUMS). In July, state police and FBI agents raided seven casinos, arrested 13 people and seized cash and financial records. They also sealed off the U.S. side of Akwesasne. After the police and FBI left the reservation, things got worse. Members of the Warrior Society's Mohawk Sovereignty Security Force (MSSF) told the media that they were the legal force in Akwesasne, although not supported by any of the councils, traditional or elected. People who had spoken out against gambling were harassed at night by Warriors, and in response about 350 Mohawks approached the Warrior's headquarters and beat up several members. A Warrior spokesman was forced through a parallel line of angry men who punched and kicked him and dragged him by his hair; a long-standing and symbolic form of public disapproval at Akwesasne (Johansen 1993:39). Shootings and violence continued, executed by both sides. In January 1990 Harold Tarbell was the only remaining antigambling chief on the elected St.Regis Tribal Council on the U.S. side of Akwesasne. He wrote to President Bush that the unresolved conflict at Akwesasne would "undermine the sovereign rights of all Indian tribes, jeopardize the integrity of the U.S. Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, and destroy economic benefits of legitimate Indian gaming activities on a national basis" (Johansen 1993:51).

On March 23 1990, gambling opponents erected roadblocks along Route 37, one at either end, known as the "Western door", and the "Eastern door"²⁵. The barricades became the center of confrontation, and antigamblers in the community contributed to maintain them. The last week of April, after many previous attempts, the Warriors trashed the barricades for the last time. From there the violence increased. By the end of April, people had started evacuating Akwesasne en masse. The violence escalated until

²⁵ The Western and the Eastern door refer to the different sides of a traditional Iroquois Longhouse.

May 1, when Mathew John Wenhisserii Pyke, a gambling opponent, and J.R. “Junior” Edwards, who had not openly neither supported or opposed gambling, were shot and killed. After the killings, police and troops converged on Akwesasne from north and south. The New York State Police occupied the U.S. side, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Ontario Provincial Police, and the Sureté du Quebec occupied the Canadian side.

Throughout the conflict, people in Akwesasne asked Governor Mario Cuomo for help. He continuously either did not respond to the requests, or refused to intervene in what he saw as ‘internal matters’. President George H.W. Bush never answered Harold Tarbell’s letter. This silence and lack of help made many people in Akwesasne feel like they were regarded as second-class citizens by the government.

Today the conflict in Akwesasne is noticeable through a latent tension present in the community between members of the Warrior Society and their opponents. People who fought each other in 1989-90 live in the same community and face each other daily, and thus political opinions are not usually expressed as openly as before the conflict. Some families were divided in the gambling issue, and fought each other. Some people were, and still are, affected by post-traumatic stress syndrome.

The civil war in Akwesasne was about more than just gambling. Behind the conflict were different interpretations of history and Mohawk traditions. The Mohawk Nation Council, the Onondaga elders, and other people who support the original political structure of the Iroquois, reject violence and look at the Warriors as illegitimate usurpers of a 1000- year-old history. The Warriors reject the governing structure as a creation of white-influenced religion and advocates a revolution from within to overthrow it. The Warriors see themselves as the true protectors of Mohawk sovereignty, and to protect this vision all adherents are taught to use firearms (Johansen 1993).

At the same time in 1990 in Oka, a town by the Mohawk communities of Kanasatake and Kahnawake in Quebec, close to Montreal, conflict arose as a nine-hole golf course was suggested extended to eighteen holes by the town. The problem was that the golf course then would be located on an old Mohawk burial ground. Armed confrontation killed the Quebec police officer Marcel Lemay on July 11. The conflict received international attention as a fight for Native sovereignty and for land. Locally, it was the source of loud and, at times, violent protests against Mohawks and Warriors by non-Native inhabitants in the area. Amelia Kalant has discussed how the conflict at Oka became a Canadian crisis as a part of the historical cultural project of making Canada a

'home and native land'. To form a nation, there is always a process of marginalization, a making of 'others'. One of these crucial 'others' in North America, as in many settler communities, is 'the Indian'. In the process of wanting to make a nation one's native home through national myths of belonging, 'the Indian' becomes a problematic figure, and conflicts like Oka create dissonance within the national symbolic order (Kalant 2004).

I will now turn to my case studies, the Freedom School and Kanatsiohareke, before I sum up the points made in this thesis and discuss the significance of tradition in the final chapter.

5.0 Education for Mohawk children in Mohawk terms

“How do Aboriginal people educate and inculcate the philosophy, values, and customs of their cultures? For the most part, education and socialization are achieved through praise, reward, recognition, and renewal ceremonies and by example, actual experience, and storytelling” (Little Bear 2000:81). The Freedom School combines education with the traditional ways of socializing the youth and teaching them about the Mohawk customs and tradition. Native-run education first appeared as a possibility in the 1960s. Since then, immersion schools and other locally run schools have appeared all over North America. Before presenting the school, I will place it in a context of Native-run education as a response to the effects of residential schools.

5.1 Native-run education

In the 1950s, education was not the main focus in many Native American communities, which were usually pressed by more immediate challenges. Funding was also difficult to find for such purposes. During that decade, an experiment was tried out on the Navajo reservation, in the community of Round Rock. The initiative was led by an Anglo-American Indian Service employee, Robert A. Roessel, Jr. He encouraged the whole community to participate, and the community developed an interest and the will to get involved. Roessel also tried to start up a school in another Navajo community, Low Mountain, but the experiment died for lack of Bureau support (Szasz 1999).

In the early 1960s the Intermountain Indian School was opened. It was a boarding school that housed about 2000 Alaskan Native American students who had to travel thousands of miles from home. This did not resemble the concept of the community school. By the mid-1960s new attitudes emerged in the Bureau education leadership, and Natives themselves had begun to take an active interest in community education. Although community schools were needed on many reservations, Alaskan Natives and Navajos had the most pressing need simply because so many of their children were sent long distances from home. In 1966, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Office of Economic Opportunity signed a contract with a group of Navajo leaders who incorporated under the name of DINE, and the Rough Rock Demonstration School was born. Even though many other communities attempted the same, Rough Rock stood for several years as a solitary example of an active experiment in Native American self-determination in education. Rough Rock contributed with, in addition to education, an

economic boost to local families. The school board was made up of local residents, and the parents were encouraged to visit the school, and to attend a summer adult-education program.

In 1967, the Navajo Curriculum Center was funded. It was started to fill the need for materials in teaching Navajo history and culture. Navajo history and culture was added to the curriculum, but the directors discovered that what they had to work with was basically an oral tradition. The Curriculum Center attempted to transform the oral tradition into the written word, and although the initial works were published in English, they were based on Navajo stories and illustrated by Navajo artists. The existence of these community schools was largely depended on the persistent effort of several people who were committed to self-determination. Roessel summarized this attitude: “To me it is a significant step in the right direction, (...) for it places the responsibility and decision-making in the hands of the Indian people and this is something that I feel is so extremely important” (Szasz: 173).

One of the most significant examples of this new political awareness was the establishment of Navajo Community College (NCC) in 1968, the first Native American-controlled and directed college in the United States. Roessel became the first president of the college. After a while, though, the college decided that non-Native faculty members should have no voice in the decision-making process of the school. Roessel was succeeded by Ned Hatathli, who stated: “This is an Indian owned and an Indian operated institution, (...) and we certainly don’t want any people other than Indian to dictate to us what is good for us” (ibid: 178). The curriculum at NCC emphasized Navajo culture and history, current tribal problems, culture change, language, creative writing. In addition, the curriculum concentrated on a wide variety of materials pertaining to Native Americans, and Anglo-Native relations. All of these subjects approached the matter from a Native point of view, to make up for decades when their cultural heritage was excluded from their children’s education. NCC also offered courses applicable to reservation job opportunities. In 1971, the student-body president, Raymond Brown observed: “NCC is what we always needed. It (...) teaches people our young people to become leaders among our own people (...) it teaches what we, the American Indian want to learn” (Szasz: 180).

In Kahnawàke, a Mohawk reservation in Canada, a school similar to the Akwesasne Freedom School was started in 1978. This happened after Mohawk high school students in Kahnawàke protested against the invisibility of Mohawk history and

culture in the non-Native public school system. Five days after the protest, the Kahnawàke Survival School opened. It was run by volunteers and dedicated to the survival of the community and its Mohawk culture. The school taught the students about Mohawk history, culture, language, and traditional skills, along with standard high school subject matter. In Kahnawàke schools today, through the work of the Mohawk Curriculum Centre, Longhouse concepts are utilized in such areas as cosmology, natural science, social values, physical education, and history. Religious instructions are available both in either Longhouse or Catholic versions according to student preference. Through these educational programs, students get a sense of identity and history, and a basic knowledge of the Longhouse world-view and ceremonial practices. “Its determination to rework and take control of all areas of the curriculum demonstrates a recognition that no aspect of education is ‘value-neutral’” (Jocks 2004:145.).

Gregory Cajete, a Tewa from New Mexico, writes that there are five major foundations that underlie Indigenous education. The first one is community, the second technical environmental knowledge, the third is the visionary or dream tradition based on an understanding that one learns through visions and dreams. The fourth is the mythic foundation, how Native people view the world through mythic traditions, and the fifth is spiritual ecology, the intimate relationship that people establish with place, environment, and all the things that make them or give them life (Cajete 2000:184). As we shall see now, the Akwesasne Freedom School tries to gather these traditional Native elements that Little Bear and Cajete talks about into the curriculum and into the structure of the school.

5.2 The Akwesasne Freedom School

The Akwesasne Freedom School (AFS) was created in 1979, as a place for wholly Mohawk education. The purpose of the school is to work to reverse the assimilation process, and preserve the Mohawk language and culture through education. In 1985, a language immersion program was started up. In 2007, the school had about 80 students, and offered grades from pre-kindergarten through six, and a transition school for grades seven, eight and some years, nine, depending on the number of students. There are usually between five to ten students in each grade.

The Akwesasne Freedom School is a language immersion school, which means that it focuses on daily use of *Kanienkeh*, the Mohawk language. For the youngest students Mohawk is the only language spoken and written at school. Before the children start school, their parents are asked if the child has a Mohawk name in the Longhouse, if the

child speaks Mohawk, and who is going to support the child at home. Support from one's family is considered to be vital for the students in incorporating the language and culture. When the students reach grade seven, eight and nine, the instructions are mostly given in English. They are also taught subjects that non-Native students learn at school; to make sure the students are prepared for public high schools. Many of the Freedom School teachers and parents hope for the school to include a high school and one day a Mohawk University. At the Freedom School, the ninth grade is high school, meaning that the lectures are all given in English. 'Maria', one of the teachers at the Freedom School said that she thought that having a high school and a university would be good, that if other indigenous peoples could do it, then the Mohawk people should be able to. "I don't think it's a bad idea", she said, but pointed out that it is important that people do not lose focus on the intentions the school was build upon – to educate the children in Mohawk terms.

Curriculum

The focus at the Freedom School, in addition to language, is to teach the students about their culture, tradition, religion etc. in a holistic way. Mohawk philosophy and cosmology motivate the curriculum, teaching methods and the pattern of the school day and year. The students at the Freedom School frequently visit the Longhouse. In addition, Faithkeepers²⁶ and Clanmothers visit the school to talk about the Ceremonies, the Creation Story, to tell traditional stories or sing traditional songs, to teach the students traditional crafts like beadwork, how to make leather items, etc. This is all considered to be valuable knowledge that needs to be passed on to the students through first-hand practice. The students are also given days off at the school to perform their rite of passage, which for the boys consists of fasting alone in the forest.

The Thanksgiving Address is used to open all traditional Mohawk gatherings, and it is also the foundation for the curriculum at the Freedom School. It provides guidelines for learning respect and giving thanks to the Creator and to all of Creation, and it teaches that Creation has a spirit and is a living being. Each school day is opened and is closed by the students giving the Thanksgiving Address in Mohawk. This way the students are also trained to be public speakers. Subjects like math, science, history, geography, reading, writing, art, storytelling etc. are all instructed by the *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen* - "The Words that Come Before All Else".

²⁶ A Faithkeeper is someone who is chosen by his or her clan and entrusted to maintain, and talk about, the customs, traditions, values, and history of the Haudenosaunee.

Language is taught thematically, and a general introduction is given to vocabulary, semantics and syntax. The students learn the language through speaking, writing, singing and reading. The final two or three years are taught in English to ease the transition to public schools, where federal funds provide about thirty minutes of Mohawk language instruction daily. Science is taught with the goal that students will develop the skills and attitudes necessary for making wise decisions about the future. History and geography are taught to help students understand their way of life from the physical, historical, economic, and human views. Both traditional ceremonial and contemporary events are examined ²⁷.

Kanien'keha:ka Aohsera, or the Mohawk Ceremonial Year, is a vital part of the students' education. The students go to the Longhouse to celebrate the Traditional fifteen ceremonies. (Ibid.). Family is also a very important part of the school, as in the Mohawk culture, and the school is also run by the parents, through the Parent Council, in cooperation with the teachers. There is thus no principal at the school. The students often go on outdoor excursions, make their own gardens and learn about nature and the traditional Mohawk teachings while doing the things they're learning about. The Creation Story is the fundamental part of *Haudenosaunee* spirituality and world view, and thus an important part of what the students are taught at the Freedom School. It tells the story about how the Earth and life on Earth was created. The Creation Story was during my stay at the Freedom School told by one of the Faithkeepers who had spent almost a whole year telling the story, which says something about the complexity of it.

Fridays during my visit at the Freedom School, the oldest students were divided into one group of girls, and one of boys. The boys would stay with the male teacher and have singing lessons with traditional songs and instruments, like rattles and drums. The girls sat together in a circle with the female teacher and had a talking circle, a well-known phenomenon in Native American cultures. The girls would pass around an object as they were talking, one by one, about what was going on in their lives, good and bad things that they wanted to share. Everyone who wanted to said something, and everyone listened to each other. This is a way of lightening one's burdens and to heal from pain and worries, as one shares it with the others in the circle who then take a piece of the burden.

²⁷ <http://pages.slic.com/mohawkna/freedom.htm#titlebar>

The founding of the Freedom School

The Freedom School was initiated founded by parents and members of the community, with the support of the tribal government. They wanted a place to educate their children on their own terms, instead of following the standards and rules of education in New York State, Ontario, or Quebec. They hoped to rebuild the nation and to reverse the assimilation process. This wish and the formation of the school have to do with the struggle for self-determined self-government and the commitment to Mohawk identity; the school's existence helps to maintain the language, history, identity and a sense of nationhood. The Freedom School has survived political, financial and institutional challenges to become what it is today, a respected and supported institution in the Mohawk community. The school has played a big part in the formation of Mohawk identity for the past couple of generations, both for the students of the school, but also for the community at large. Several of the former students of the school have come back to teach there. A part of the school's goal is to educate strong leaders for the community, leaders who have the knowledge of the traditional teachings, know the language, and who want to preserve this knowledge and make decisions based on it for the best of the community. The issue of leadership is a crucial one in the struggle for the sovereignty of the Mohawk Nation.

When the Freedom School started up almost thirty years ago, many people in the community supported the initiative. Some people were against it, though, and called the school "free to be dumb". There are still some people who say this, but all in all there is not much resistance now. 'Mary', one of the people who took initiative to start the Freedom School told me of all the hard work she and the others who were a part of it, put into the school. Mary taught all the grades from two through nine, and had to make most of the books herself. She did not have an education for teaching, and she only knew a little *Kanienkeh*. Thus, she had to teach herself most of the things she was going to teach the students. In the beginning, the teachers were not getting paid; they only got a little money for fuel. The classes were, like today, taught in what public schools call "whole language learning". This means that language instructions are integrated into all classes, like math, science, etc.

When I asked Mary what the "Freedom" in "Freedom School" means to her, she said: "it means that the community has the freedom to educate our own children in our own terms". Mary's reason for getting so involved in the school was that she was brought up in a Catholic home, and was taught that she was not supposed to know the language,

that she should be assimilated and ashamed over her Mohawk identity. Even today, she still sometimes feels the shame she felt when she was young. She therefore wanted the children of Akwesasne to have an opportunity to go to a school where they can learn the language and learn about their culture; since there was nowhere else they could go to learn these things.

The parents and teachers at the Freedom School expressed a deep concern about their children's education and that they have to learn what the parents did not. Two generations ago, many spoke the language and knew their culture and tradition, but did not want to teach their kids about it. This is linked to the assimilation policy executed by the U.S. and Canadian governments, and the social stigma that grew from it. The experiences from the residential schools and other 'Western' schools have left scars in people's hearts and minds. Several people told me about the feeling of shame about their own culture and language that sticks with them today. One of the teachers told me that people make fun of others who cannot speak the language well, and others told me that because of this they feel too insecure to speak *Kanienkeha* in public. The result is that many parents today do not know as much as their children do after they start attending immersion schools like the Freedom School.

"... one day the children are going to be the ones to teach the parents..."

- Mohawk legend.

5.2.1 An alternative education system

"(...) education is really about helping an individual find his or her face, which means finding out who you are, where you come from, and your unique character. (...) Indigenous education is, in its truest form, about learning relationships in context. This context begins with family. It extends to the clan, to the community and tribe, and to all of the world" (Cajete 2000:183).

The instructions at Akwesasne Freedom School are different from mainstream American schools. The teachers refer to it as 'holistic' learning; the subjects that in other schools are separated and taught in different classes, are at the Freedom School taught as parts of a whole. The extent to which the Mohawk language and culture is present at the AFS is referred to as 'whole-language learning'.

The Lakota scholar Vine Deloria (1999) argues that education in the English-American context

”...resembles indoctrination more than it does other forms of teaching, because it insists on implanting a particular body of knowledge and a specific view of the world that often does not correspond to the life experiences that people have or might be expected to encounter”.“(...) Education today trains professionals, but it does not produce people. It is, indeed, not expected to produce personality growth (...). (...) in traditional society the goal is to ensure personal growth and then to develop professional expertise” (Deloria 1999: 139).

Deloria think it is important for Native Americans to move away from what he refers to as ‘Western’ (Euro-American) education, and its values and theories. The old (Native) ways of educating was built upon the idea that human personality was derived from accepting the responsibility to be a contributing member of society. A group life, essentially within a family, is the basis for Native American tradition, and Deloria thinks, for education, in comparison to the more individual education students get in the ‘Western’ schools.

“A solid foundation in the old traditional ways enables the students to remember that life is not scientific, social scientific, mathematical, or even religious; life is a unity, and the foundation for learning must be the unified experience of being a human being”. (...) Traditional education gives us an orientation to the world around us, particularly the people around us, so that we know who we are and have confidence when we do things” (Deloria 1999: 142f).

Deloria thinks that the ‘Western’ educational system is oriented towards science and secularism in such a way that it implies that the natural world and its inhabitants are wholly materialistic, a world view that doesn’t fit in with the traditional Native American one, where nature and family are connected closely to the individual’s spiritual and cosmological as well as physical world.

Wendy C. Kasten (1992) also argues that whole language learning is much more compatible with Native American beliefs than “Western” style education. A report published in 1989, Education Week, stated that Native students had the highest dropout rates, suicide rates, and likelihood to be labelled as handicapped of any American minority group. The cause of this had to be examined. Karsten argues that the principles of whole language learning and many Native American children’s culture are related.

Whole language learning also emphasizes process over product, the journey is as important as the destination. Cooperation and community, as opposed to competition, is also an important element. Whole language learning also suggests that the learning of reading and writing are parallel to the learning of oral language. These skills are learned holistically in whole language learning, not in separate steps, just like Native American cultures emphasize how everything in life is connected. Whole language classes often have a good selection of literature, which the student can choose from. In Native American cultures, storytelling is an important part of life, and the stories usually say something valuable about life, spirituality, social behaviour, etc.

Whole language learning also incorporates qualitative assessment in place of, or in addition to, standard quantitative assessments, like a multiple-choice format. Many Native American groups teach that all possibilities among choices need to be given thorough consideration. Whole language learning often involves projects that focus on critical examination instead of focusing merely on fact or information. Thus, the students may better examine “why” instead of merely “how”, which reflects many Native American belief systems.

The instructions are also usually active rather than passive. Many instructions are given outside of books. At the Freedom School, the teachers have made much of the instruction material themselves, and a significant part of the instructions are given outside, and through songs and instruments, crafts and artistic expressions. The Freedom School (AFS) teachers got feedback from the off-reservation high schools that former students at the AFS are very good students. They seem to know both their own culture and language, and the mainstream, non-Native culture and English²⁸.

5.3 The parents and teachers at the Akwesasne Freedom School

Not all traditional parents send their children to the Freedom School, and not all people who send their children there are traditional Longhouse people. There seems to be a divide between parents and teachers who think that the students should learn as much

²⁸ This is in many contexts referred to as “walking in two worlds”. Henze and Vanett argue that this is a misleading expression, though, because it sounds like there are two distinct and clearly defined cultures, assuming that they are internally uniform. As all cultures, Mohawk people are internally fragmented in world views and opinions, dialects (and language), and religion, etc. Thus it is not valid to talk about a uniform culture. Another assumption is that everyone means the same thing by ‘walking in two worlds’, and that the children have accessibility to two worlds that can be merged in one ‘bicultural’ individual. The expression also implies that they have access to both traditional Mohawk, and ‘Western’ role models (Henze and Vanett 1993).

about Mohawk language, culture and tradition as possible, and not so much or anything about the dominant 'Western' culture; and parents who think that their children aren't going to have much use of Mohawk when they have to interact with the non-Native society. The latter think that the students should learn at least as much about English and Euro-American culture as they do now, or more.

There are different reasons for the parents to send their children to the Freedom School, but many of the parents I talked to said that they wanted their children to learn the language and to know their religion and tradition, because it's an important part of their culture and who they are. They considered The Freedom School to be the only place where their children could learn all of this.

"Teaching is a way of healing and a way of life. As a teacher, I have to know something about almost everything" (Cajete 2000:187).

To find out what motivates the teachers to work at the Freedom School- the job is not paid well and it demands much commitment and dedication by the teachers and the parents; and the parents to send their children to this specific school, I talked to some of them and asked them about their thoughts about the school.

'Kelly', a woman in her thirties with two children at the school, was the first of several people to tell me that she believes that we are at a critical point in time when it comes to reviving and preserving the Mohawk language and culture. "So much knowledge is disappearing with them, since so many in my own generation do not know all the things that the Elders do. There are many debates within Native communities and there are so few left to ask. It is possible to preserve the language", she said about the elder generation passing away. "(...) but there is so much culture, history, speeches, ceremonies, and processes involved in it that needs to be remembered. Small pieces of things like the Ceremonies disappear, so much of it is not written down and needs to be taught orally". She expressed scepticism towards trusting many of the things that are written down, because very often they were written by priests and others from the outside. Kelly grew up in a traditional home, and was told about the Way of Life by elder relatives. "It's important to hold on to our ethnicity. What is it that makes us who we are?". She was not worried about her kids, because they seemed strong and secure about themselves. This was expressed by many of the parents and teachers; the students are

strong and know who they are, because they are taught about their own culture from a very young age.

Due to the many bad experiences with boarding/residential schools by Native Americans, many are negative towards “white education” and see it as not good enough. ‘Kathie’ had been a teacher at the school for a while, and some of her kids were students there. She originally sent her children to the school because it was the nearest to their home (“actually!”), but she had realized that there were no one else who could teach her children about their culture and language. She did not want her children to learn the history and about the culture that belongs to the people she had fought against herself, she said, referring to mainstream America. She hopes for a Mohawk High School, because now the students go to other schools and are “blended by shiny, white faces”, and “we lose many kids that way”. If there was a High School, Native people could meet and the kids could meet other people than the ones they have known all their lives, and thus think of as their brothers and sisters. A positive side to the Freedom School are the traditional family values, she said. It is a family oriented school where the teachers are like aunts and uncles.

Kathie was not as positive to the school now, though, like she had been in the past, because she thought so many things had changed lately, that there was a different atmosphere at the school. She assumed that the film crew that had been there for almost a year probably had something to do with it, since they were present so often. Another thing she had a problem with was the fact that many of the young teachers were open to accept funding from the state, federal organisations etc, which the people who were involved in the school in the past were completely against doing. “But if you’re hungry, then...”, she said, referring to the challenge of getting funding. At the same time she was very positive towards some of the new, young people who are involved with the school now, people who have “everything under control”. Kathie’s hopes for the future was that the school continues, that there will still be fluent speakers there and that people like the Faithkeepers continue to visit the school. “The language is changing and many people are upset about it, but at least we still have the language here... Prophecies say that in the end there will only be a handful of people left who know the culture and who fight for it, but these people will not be the ones we think they are gonna be”.

‘Anne’ was one of the central figures at the Freedom School in the 90s. She is a fluent speaker of Mohawk, although she grew up in a Catholic home. She did not learn about her own culture until she was in her thirties. Anne felt uplifted when looking to

other indigenous groups and their schools for inspiration. “The Maori and Polynesians in Hawaii, for example, have managed to work it out with schools and universities, so why wouldn’t we?”. She would love to see the existence of a Mohawk university, so that Mohawk people do not have to go to a “white” university to get a degree. Anne felt that the Freedom School helps the students to figure out who they are, they know their own identity and culture. A problem there, though, she said, is that many of the students speak Mohawk in class, but English during the breaks. She used to do the opposite herself when she was in a Catholic school growing up, speak English in class and Mohawk during breaks.

Many people involved in the Freedom School pointed to the difference between members of different generations. The grandparent-generation often spoke the language fluently, but many were sent to residential schools and experienced traumatizing things there that made them choose not to teach their children. In the young generation there are now many speakers, though, thanks to schools like the Akwesasne Freedom School. A school like that necessarily faces many short-and long-term challenges.

‘John’, a Mohawk man from a nearby town, was not as positive about immersion schools as many others. He did not believe that they work, because the students are bombarded with mainstream culture all the time. He also pointed out that the original traditional Mohawk culture and language is gone, that the fluent speakers are almost gone. As an example he showed me how the words in the language used to mean something descriptive, but now they are often directly translated from English. The word for the bird ‘Robin’ used to mean something like ‘bird with fire in his chest’, now it just means ‘Robin’, he said. John wanted to go back to the ‘roots’ of being Mohawk, and that Native people should stand together and fight for their rights. He would like to have lived an Amish-like existence to preserve what is genuinely Mohawk. He thinks that the reservations did not do themselves a favor when they introduced the “white”, elected councils. “Now the people who choose white culture fight against the longhouse people”. John believed that there is a conspiracy by “white society” towards Native people to divide them up into groups so that they could not fight back. He also said of casinos that the plan was to introduce them into Akwesasne, and when they were established and people had acquired gambling debts, the government started talking about removing the casinos altogether.

‘Maria’, a teacher at the school, emphasized that this is a critical time in Akwesasne for revitalizing language and culture. “Many things have been lost because

they are not done anymore, like boat building, fishing etc., and many words are lost or have lost their descriptive meaning”. Maria thinks that this critical point has come now because “we have been too relaxed about it...but we see that it is needed now”. She pointed out how the students at the Freedom School seem to know who they are. She chose not to send her own daughter to the school herself, because she thought that she was going to learn the language anyway, which she did not. Maria went through a change in life where she decided to learn the language and to live with a Mohawk spirituality. She thus took a class in Mohawk, and ended up teaching at the school. A significant demand by the school of the teachers is that they have to be fluent in *Kanienkeh*. Maria was raised in a Catholic home, attended a “white” school, where she said she learned “everything other than how to be the person I am”. She now feels that the children should be educated by their own people. She is teaching there because she thinks it is important for the students to know who they are and to become strong leaders, that they know their rights and their strengths. The children also need the English language, she said, because “that it how the world is now”, but people need to live like they were supposed to be, and that means being a Native and living like a Native, while communicating with the rest of the world to achieve things. Politically, she feels that “if we can’t do it ourselves, then nothing good is going to happen. We can’t wait for the Government to do anything good. That’s why I think about what *I* can do, as an individual”.

‘Daniel’, one of the male teachers, felt very lucky to be teaching at the Freedom School. He does not believe in formal education, and thus liked being able to organize his classes in his own way. He appreciated the way the school emphasized being outside, in the fields or woods, and planting gardens, while learning about the culture.

‘Margaret’, a parent who also work at the Freedom School, did not like the way other schools on the reservation are structured either. She did not grow up in a traditional home, and did not know much about Mohawk culture. She spoke the language a little bit, but did not know much of the spiritual parts of the culture. After she started working at the Freedom School she realized just how strong and rich the Mohawk culture still is. Margaret felt like the school showed her what she was missing in her life, in terms of spirituality, mentality, and developmentally. She now sees how important the Mohawk Way of Life is, and thinks that the school has so much to offer in that aspect.

Still, she told me how she felt that something is missing – the students are strong and know who they are, but they do not get the same support and strength at home. Margaret pointed out, though, that the students get a great knowledge of who they are

through the school, they are “living history” – doing what their ancestors did; fishing, hunting, go to the Longhouse etc. It gives them strength, and they have their roots here in Akwesasne, “they are grounded”. She compared this groundedness with other cultures where people are strong – “you live your life first...the original way”. What she sees for the students is that they have a gentler, more respectful way of being than other children. “We all have problems, but these kids seem to be able to face challenges better”. “It’s like this school is a healing process for what our people has gone through. When you walk through these hallways, you get really conscious about who you are, and you want to help other people. We deal with so many kids here, kids of single parents, kids who are getting abused and so on...”. Margaret’s hope is that the Freedom School one day may have an university, that the students can stay until they are twenty-one years old. She pointed out to me that even though many people want to help; this school is for the Mohawk people. “It’s about us and about what’s important”.

5.4 Challenges

A challenge to immersion school training like at the Freedom School is that many of the students do not speak *Kanienkeh* at home, only English. This way, the students do not feel secure enough about speaking the language. I noticed that many of them seemed to understand *Kanienkeh* well, but rarely answered back in *Kanienkeh*, only in English. They speak the Mohawk language at the school from the age of four, they go to the Longhouse where the Ceremonies are all in *Kanienkeh*, and they say the *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen* at least twice a day at school. Still, there seems to be a barrier for many of them to talk to fellow students or others in *Kanienkeh*. A reason for this may be the problems that many of their parents face and has experienced with the use of the language.

The school’s practical challenges are things like funding and that the houses are in good shape. The school was supposed to move to a different location, but the lack of funding has delayed the moving. It is also very important to have teachers who speak the language. Some of the present teachers have been students at the Freedom School themselves, something the people involved in the school hope will happen even more. The furthering of traditional culture in an educational setting serves at least three purposes; to enable the people to maintain an identity separate from a U.S. or Canadian one, to strengthen the bonds within the community, and to gain political sovereignty (Hlebowicz et. al. 2004).

6.0 The Mohawk return to the Valley

Another location and group of people that I visited and found to have been, and still is, contributing to the revitalization movement in Mohawk country today, is the Kanatsiohareke Mohawk Community. Kanatsiohareke is located in the Mohawk Valley between Albany and Fonda, New York, a beautiful green valley alongside the Mohawk River. The land on which the community is located was originally the site of a Bear Clan village, until the inhabitants were forced to move. The location was in the late 1700s the home of Major Jelles Fonda, later the home of William Schenk and, more recently, a county home for the elderly, known as Montgomery Manor, before it became the Kanatsiohareke Mohawk Community in 1993. Tom Porter bought the property in an auction led by the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors. Porter and friends raised money, they were given donations, and in the end they were able to buy the property.

The community consists of four main buildings, the Main House, the East Wing, the Little House, and the West Wing, which all face the Mohawk River. These buildings housed in 2007 some apartments, a Bed and Breakfast, and a Craft Shop. In addition to the main buildings, there is a big, red barn, a workshop, a woodshed and some smaller buildings. The barn houses several cattle and horses, and the community grow corn, beans and squash, food plants which in Mohawk tradition are known as ‘The Three Sisters’. The community land stretches over about 400 acres, some of it in the forest behind the buildings, where a peaceful path leads you through it.

Although mechanical farm equipment is used, the farm is organic, no chemicals or pesticides are used for the gardens and fields. The fields are cut to make hay for the cows and horses, and corn, beans, squash and strawberries are grown in close proximity to the farm buildings.

6.1 Mission

The mission of the Kanatsiohareke Mohawk Community is to ”promote the development of a community based on the tradition, philosophy, and governance of the *Haudenosaunee*, and to contribute to the preservation of the culture of people as a framework for a blend of traditional Native concerns with the best of the emerging new earth friendly, environmental ideologies that run parallel to these traditions.

To conduct programs in the culture & traditions of the people; to foster an active accumulation of spoken Mohawk language by members of the community; and to continue the oral traditions, stories, songs and dances in the unique spirit of the Mohawk path”²⁹.

The people who first moved to Kanatsiohareke from Akwesasne wanted a new, peaceful place to live according to Mohawk traditions.

Porter and a group of other traditional Mohawks from St. Regis Mohawk reservation [Akwesasne] near Massena hope this place, with its woods, water and rattlesnakes, will heal some of the headaches and heartache that have gnawed at the reserve for years: drug use, alcoholism, smuggling, shootings, and disputes over gambling, money and leadership that broke up families, embittered friends, led to violence and, more than once, death (Reilly 1993).

Tom Porter and others hope to leave behind the problems of Akwesasne—political infighting between traditionalists and progressives, the pollution of the land and water from decades of fallout and effluent from industries that crowd the banks at the confluences of several rivers. (...) They also hope to create an environment where "we can preserve our language, ceremonies, our philosophies, the way we look at the world, for ourselves and our children and grandchildren," Porter said.

"This is like-minded people going someplace we can preserve what we are as native people," Porter said. "I don't want to be arrogant. We aren't saying we'll do it; there's no formula, no blueprint, and things are so shattered, so many wounds. We don't know if we will be successful, but this will be our damnedest try."

"Even though we're moving doesn't mean we're abandoning Akwesasne," Porter said. "There will be an open door, both ways. But in the new place, there will be no drugs, no alcohol, no gambling. We're going to stay within our spiritual teaching and tradition." (Reilly 1993).

We know that in the 12th Century, there were at least three Mohawk villages in this area of the Mohawk Valley. After conflicts with the European settlers in the 1700s, the people from these villages moved up to Akwesasne and other communities by the St. Lawrence River. Therefore, the inhabitants of Kanatsiohareke today refer to their community as *re-established*. The community political and spiritual leader, as well as executive director, Tom Porter's ancestors lived in the Bear Clan village that existed at the very same location. An old prophecy says that one day the Mohawk people would return to the valley, and in 1993 they did.

Alcohol, drugs and gambling are forbidden at Kanatsiohareke, also for the guests at the Bed and Breakfast. Many of the people who come to Kanatsiohareke have a history of

²⁹<http://www.mohawkcommunity.com/>

alcohol abuse or other similar problems. When I asked 'Daniel', who worked his way out of alcohol abuse, why he thought so many Native Americans have substance abuse problems, he said "We're a colonized people, we don't know who we are...First we fought the Dutch...then we fought the English...then the Americans...and now we fight ourselves". Other people talked about coming to bars, drinking with their parents since they were teenagers, etc. An estimated number was that about ninety percent of the families in Akwesasne have problems with alcohol abuse within the family. Daniel and others I met gave much credit to the existence of Kanatsiohareke and the people there, who had helped them out of substance abuse and identity struggles.

The inhabitants of Kanatsiohareke (in the summer of 2007) are Mohawk and Choctaw, as Tom Porter's wife and sister-in-law are Choctaw from Mississippi. Non-Native people are not allowed to settle down there, but they are allowed to visit and spend time in the community to visit, work, and learn about the *Haudenosaunee*. My main informant at Kanatsiohareke said, "If we allow everyone to come and live here, it would be like 1492 all over again!". The whole point is to have a community for traditional Mohawk, a place where tradition can be preserved and handed on through lectures, ceremonies and conferences. At the same time, the place is used for information and accessibility for Non-Natives, to create a closer relationship between different cultures.

6.2 Activities

The activities that take place at Kanatsiohareke throughout the year are among other things conferences, fundraisers, language classes in the summer, the Strawberry Festival in June, and the Fasting ritual in May and October. The summer I spent in the community the language classes were cancelled, because there were not enough applicants for the classes, but previous summers they have been well-attended by people who came to learn the language and learn about the *Haudenosaunee*. The community has many visitors throughout the year, as well as volunteers for work that needs to be done in the community, and for the festival and other activities. Students from several close-by colleges and universities, as well as from organizations and associations in the area come to visit. Sometimes students will come to help out, and are given lectures about *Haudenosaunee* culture and people in return. Some people travel across the country to come to Kanatsiohareke, and there are many regular visitors from near and far.

One of the visions that the inhabitants at Kanatsiohareke had was that they could contribute to the reversal of the effect that the residential schools had on people. Thus a project of giving language classes was started up in 1998. The first year the language session lasted for four weeks, which was changed to three weeks the next year, and then two weeks the year after that. This due to the fact that many thought it was too long for the attendants to stay away from their homes and families. An important part of the classes was also that the students worked on the farm and spent time with each other and with people who taught them about the traditional Mohawk world view. This way “They learned how language is tied to our cultural, social and spiritual values. They lived the language” (Porter 2006:123). During my fieldwork I heard many people talk about the feeling of not knowing the language, how some of the contents of the language also means losing some of the knowledge surrounding ceremonies and traditional ways of life. Thus language projects like this mean very much to many people. The language classes are given partly in a classroom and some outside or in the kitchen while preparing meals. No English is spoken during class. The instructions include vocabulary, conversation, pronunciation and the recitation of the *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen*, The Thanksgiving Address. Over the years, when asked what they wanted to learn, many of the students have asked to learn the *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen*, the Thanksgiving Address, so that they could go home knowing how to thank the Creator in their own language (Porter 2006:124).

In addition to language classes, the attendants were also given evening talks about culturally and spiritually significant topics like the Great Law, the Creation Story, the Clan System, etc. They also did excursions in the area to significant sites. In 2002 the classes were moved to Akwesasne due to lack of space at Kanatsiohareke. Since then the number of students was reduced every year, and as mentioned, the summer I spent at Kanatsiohareke the language classes were cancelled due to low enrolment. Porter writes (Porter 2006:128) that while at first he was disheartened by this, he got several reports from other Mohawk communities where former language class students at Kanatsiohareke had started up their own language programs. He realized that maybe they had been successful at giving people a basis for teaching others too. In 2002 Kanatsiohareke hosted a Mohawk Language meeting where estimated numbers of fluent speakers of *Kanienkeha* in different Mohawk communities were compared, and concluded that there were more fluent speakers in 2002 than there had been in 1997. This

became a source of optimism, that the language programs in Iroquoia are working, against the odds.

6.2.1 The Fasting

Many traditional Mohawks regularly perform the Fasting ritual. While fasting, one is meant to reflect upon one's life, the values one has, and how to use them in life.

In May of 2007 I was so fortunate as to be a part of the Fasting ritual. I worked as a volunteer in the kitchen during the four days that the Fasting lasts. The volunteers in the kitchen are all women, and the men work in the fields or around the house.

The women prepare three meals a day, and set the table for everyone to eat together. When the supporters eat together they also eat and drink on behalf of the Fasters, they all think about them and send them good thoughts. I was told that it is common during these days that the volunteers who stay by the house dream more than usual. One of the women had a dream that one of the young boys who were up in the forest was cold and wet. The next day she went up into the forest to bring him a blanket, and she found the boy to be both wet and cold after the heavy rain the night before. The atmosphere in and around the community felt electric those four days, both because of the events that were taking place, the conversations about dreams and spirits, and the damp air that caused the rain and thunder to hit us at night.

The Fasters spend four days and four nights out in the forest, without food. When someone decides to start the fasting for the first time, they have to prepare themselves about a year in advance. They often talk to the Elders to learn about the purpose of fasting, and to prepare for what the purpose of the Fasting should be for them. The Fasting is also a rite of passage for young boys. The boys can choose for themselves when they are ready to do it. Usually these boys are fourteen-fifteen years old, but I also heard of twelve year old boys who fasted. Their first time, the boys spend one night out in the forest, since it can be a powerful and sometimes frightening experience, especially if they have powerful dreams and/or visions, like many do. The next year they stay out for two nights, etc. up until the fourth year. People can choose for themselves if they wish to stay out for four days and nights, or if they want to start with for instance forty-eight hours. The 'rule' is that the fasters should do the fasting ritual four times, four days a year for four years, or four days times two a year for two years. Some people choose to continue to do the fasting after they have done their four times, because it gives them insight into themselves and their lives.

When a person prepares to do the Fasting, he or she usually talks to the Elders, who tell them if or when they are ready and other people who have done it before. Many also help out as volunteers once or twice before they fast themselves. The year before fasting, one should eat healthy and exercise, get rid of toxins and be in physically good shape, since the fasting is physically, as well as mentally, demanding. During that year the faster also gathers a few things that he or she needs during the fasting: eagle feathers, tobacco ties, sweetgrass, sage, sinew, red willow, abalone shell, and a pipe. They also prepare themselves mentally for the fasting. The making of the tobacco ties follows a certain procedure. One should grow one's own tobacco, and it should be done in the morning, the quietest time of the day.

When the faster prepares the ties s/he turns to the four directions, following the colours of the Medicine Wheel. First s/he turns to the East, to the yellow-skinned people, and asks for help for the fasting from everything that comes from the East. Then to the North, to the white-skinned people, to the West to the black-skinned people, and then to the South to the red-skinned people, and asks for help from all directions. When one is tying the ties, one should think about what one wants to focus on during the fasting. The mood one is in when tying the ties may influence the way one feels during the fasting. One of my informants in Akwesasne said that when she was tying the tobacco ties for the first time she was going to fast, she felt scared. Thus, when she was out in the forest on her first fasting, she felt equally scared. When the faster is out in the forest, it is important that he or she thinks about herself, and not worry about anyone else. Family members should therefore not fast at the same time, only one at the time, while the others stay by the house and cook food or work.

The first day of the Fasting, everyone eat breakfast together. Before the fasters go into the forest, a tobacco burning takes place. They ask for help during the fasting, and pray for nice weather. The fasters put tobacco in their pipes, thank the Creator and the four directions, but do not smoke it until the Fast is over. Then the fasters go two rounds in the sweat lodge. The first round one introduces oneself to the Creator with name and clan, and in the second round one asks for help from the Creator. Everyone has a helper, but after the sweat lodge they are not supposed to speak in long sentences, or look at anyone. Then, the fasters go up in the forest, to a place they have picked out beforehand, and set up a tobacco tie in a circle around the spot. On the way up to the fasting spot, the fasters carry a willow stick that is bent in a circle to represent the Medicine Wheel. It summons the power from the four directions. They also carry a bowl of food and a pipe.

The helpers carry the rest. When they reach the spot they are spending the next days at, a man will sing a song, and the person leading the group into the forest will talk about how long the faster will stay there. The faster has a tarp as protection against the rain, a sleeping bag, and a knife.

During the Fasting, the faster prays and says the Thanksgiving Address at least three times a day. She lights the pipe, say her prayer into it and holds it to the sky so that the smoke, and with it -the prayer, rises up to the Creator. It is a common experience for the fasters that they dream a lot when they sleep, as they do not have any outside interference. Some fasters have visions, while others receive messages through dreams or thoughts which they do not recognize as their own thoughts.

On the fourth day of the fasting, the helpers come up to bring the fasters down to the house. Before the faster leave his or her spot, she tips over the bowl of food, which has not been touched, and leaves it there. Then she carries the medicine stick and the pipe down from the forest. When the faster comes down to the house, he or she has two more rounds in the sweat lodge. The first round one gives thanks for what one is given, and in the second round one can sing if one wants, smoke the pipe, and give thanks to the Creation. Afterwards the faster can talk about her experiences during the fasting if she wants. Then, the fasters may take a shower and eat food prepared by the women in the kitchen. After the meal, the Fasting is closed in a circle around the fire with the *Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen* - the Thanksgiving Address.

It is said that during the first year after the Fasting, your ancestors watch to see how you behave. After the fourth Fasting the faster will see what his or her gifts are.

6.2.2 The Strawberry Festival

The Strawberry Festival is an annual event taking place for two days indoors and outdoors at Kanatsiohareke. The Strawberry plant is the most important medicine plant for *Haudenosaunee* people, and the celebration of it takes place in the summer when the berries are ripe. In the Creation Story, the strawberry plant, along with other medicine plants, grew from Skywoman's daughter's grave. The earth was referred to as "Our Mother" by one of the twins, as do Native people, because their mother had become one with the earth.

The festival at Kanatsiohareke is open to everyone who wants to come, and lecturers and performers come from near and far to perform or give lectures during the festival. Outside by the barn there is a stage where Native musicians from Akwesasne

and other places perform traditional songs, blues, country, rock, etc. all day. Vendors and food stands are open all day; volunteers make food like frybread, 'Indian corn' soup, sweet potato fries, etc. When I was there bands were playing all day, we could witness the making of sweetgrass baskets, and there were plenty of activities outdoors and indoors. A group of Tuscarora dancers were there to perform traditional social dances, and during some dances the audience were asked to participate. The vendors were all Native American, and sold mostly handmade crafts of beads, leather, feathers etc.; jewellery, paintings, belts, baskets, etc. The visitors could go on carriage rides with horses through the forest path, listen to traditional storytelling, go on a medicine walk- where a woman with knowledge of the plants and how to use them identified medicine plants. Inside there were an auction, movies were shown with a Native theme, some people made a circle and talked about the significance of dreams, etc.

The first night of the festival there was a full moon, and the women gathered to perform a Moon Ceremony. Grandmother Moon, as the moon is called, is important for women in *Haudenosaunee* tradition, through the way it affects the woman's cycle and thus life itself. Women are said to be given energy from the moon, especially when it is full. The Moon Ceremony is done, we were told, because women are always expected to be strong through the responsibilities we have, and so we have to stand together and share our thoughts and feelings. We sat down in a talking circle around a fire and, after being smudged with sage, shared what we wanted to say about ourselves and things that occupied our minds, and then we burned tobacco as a sacrifice and prayed for our families and other people in our lives. In the end we sacrificed water out in the field and thanked the Moon and the Earth. The ceremony was opened and closed with the *Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen*. Afterwards we shared some food and thanked each other.

The same night there was also a social, people danced around a fire while men were singing traditional songs. It is common in Mohawk communities to have a social when people are gathered for different events and celebrations.

6.3 The significance of Kanatsiohareke

Moving away from Akwesasne to start up a traditional Mohawk community in the Mohawk Valley can be seen as a political statement about preserving something important in the Mohawk culture that means a lot for many people. It is deeply connected to the feeling of urgency and loss of language and culture, and thus the necessity of doing

something fast that works. This feeling has been the inspiration for language, education projects, and indigenous rights movements.

“It’s all about cultural preservation and revitalization so that we will have something of value to hand down and share with the future generations”, Porter has said of the work he and others have put into the community (Porter 2006:130). My impression of Kanatsiohareke was that it was a way both of preserving language and tradition, but also a way of showing outsiders that there was a lot going on before the Europeans arrived, and that there are many traditional and new things happening in Mohawk communities.

Kanatsiohareke has become a cultural, social, and political project through demonstrating independence and self-determination, through marking a distance to the troubles in Akwesasne, and through an act of traditionalism and cultural preservation.

Kanatsiohareke has become a place where people, Native and non-Native, but especially Mohawk people, come because it represents and creates a physical space for the longing for knowledge about, and an emotional connection to, Mohawk people, culture, and tradition. During the fasting ritual that is performed here twice a year, people told me that they travel long distances to do their fasting at Kanatsiohareke, because they feel so connected to their tradition and ancestors there. The existence of the community also seems to give people hope for the future and it presents an opportunity for the next generations to know their cultural background.

Several people I talked to at Kanatsiohareke also talked about how the community helped them overcome problems like substance abuse and helping them define themselves as Mohawk, in addition to learning more about the Mohawk language and culture. An *Akwesasneron* who often visits the community expressed how he did not know who he was until he stopped drinking, which he did after he started visiting Kanatsiohareke. Now he keeps coming back to Kanatsiohareke because he feels close to his culture there. People also said they feel at home in the Mohawk Valley, because it was, and is, their ancestors’ home.

7.0 A Time for Healing?

I have now looked at the historical and political context and expressions of traditionalism and cultural revitalization in the two addressed Mohawk communities. I will now turn to look at what tradition *means* in the addressed empirical cases, and finally address the presented perspective of decolonization and ‘healing’ that I find to be useful in this matter.

7.1 The significance of tradition

I started this thesis by looking at some anthropological theories about tradition. My interpretation of Mohawk traditionalism is that the redefining and reappropriations of indigeneity is not a return to the past, but reimaginings of the future. Indigenous cultures can be said to represent their own kind of modernity, not in the ‘Western’ sense of the term, but one that contains conscious reappropriation of tradition, symbols, and practices which originated in the past, but that have contemporary and changing meanings. Scholars who relate indigenous traditions to a ‘Western’ idea of modernity and the constructions of traditions to achieve political goals, do not seem to acknowledge that the values and cultural objectives emphasized by indigenous peoples, are distinct goals in themselves (Sissons 2005).

Tradition is emphasized by different groups and factions in Mohawk societies today as an important source of identity, in different ways. For Longhouse traditionalists, an important part of the traditional Mohawk values can in few words be summed up as peace, unity, respect, and having a Good Mind. The Great Law of Peace with the central message of peace, power and righteousness is a central part of this. Some important differences in traits that are valued by the different factions is often connected to attitudes towards non-violence approaches versus use of force, and gambling versus no gambling. Member of the Warrior Society train with weapons and see gambling as an important source of income, while other traditionalists value peace as a central part of Mohawk tradition and way of life, and see gambling as a destructive force in Native communities.

The Kanatsiohareke community has chosen to prohibit “disturbing” elements that exist in Akwesasne, like alcohol and gambling. It seems important for Kanatsiohareke to remain a “closed”, separate community in the sense of not allowing any non-Natives to move in, if they are to stay strong as an arena for Mohawk traditionalism. This way they

can promote and represent Mohawk values to outsiders as a unit, and rather open up to outsiders in the form of conferences, lectures, festivals, etc. In Akwesasne it may be harder to bridge the gap between Mohawks and non-Natives, as the world views and opinions in Akwesasne are much more diverse than at Kanatsiohareke.

When groups work to revitalize their culture, they recreate the “traditional” culture in a “modern” way. To be heard in the public and political sphere, many minority groups have to be a part of the “modern” system, and to use the majority’s language and symbols. The activation of ethnic symbols produces a meaningful focus for a nationalist movement; it gathers people and gives the individual a sense of a cultural basis and dignity; it’s both instrumental and expressive (Hylland Eriksen 1998:396). The Freedom School is based on traditional values, but the school itself as an institution is a non-Native invention. Mohawk children used to learn directly from their parents and the community through witnessing and performing the actions based on essential knowledge that was necessary for life in the village.

Chris Jocks (2004) points to how modernity is represented by mainstream public North American educational systems, designed to teach mainstream cultural knowledge and values. Schools like the Akwesasne Freedom School’s determination to rework and take control of the curriculum demonstrates recognition of the fact that no aspect of education is “value-neutral”. The school becomes a protest and resistance to the mainstream modernity, and at the same time work to define and give a sense of identity and belonging. This gives a message to the mainstream, by using a mainstream institution to reverse some of the effects from the residential schools and to strengthen cultural identities and revitalizing culture and language.

The issue of Mohawk traditionalism can on a large scale be placed within a context of a global discourse of indigenous peoples and sovereignty, autonomy, self-determination and self-definition. In the age of globalization, global impulses on some level affect local impulses and articulations, and it thus becomes important to protect one’s identity as a distinct people. On a smaller scale, in the Mohawk context, there are as many ways of viewing the world as there are Mohawk individuals, though there are things that all Mohawk people have in common; - a collective past and tradition that makes up a foundation for most world views, but that are always subjected to negotiation and new definitions in a changing world.

Contemporary indigeneity is not just about preserving culture and language, but also about ownership of it. Indigenous cultures are partly defined through relations to

settlers and colonial forces, and indigeneity and decolonization is about taking back the ownership and reclaiming what has been lost. “(...) what is appropriated is never the same as that which was lost, and in the process of reappropriating meaning and significance are further transformed” (Sissons 2005:140).

Indigenous peoples in colonized areas of the world are in many arenas working towards healing as a people and as individuals, as it has become necessary to deal with both concrete experiences like assimilation, pollution, substance abuse, residential schools, and in Akwesasne the civil war of 1989-90, etc. In addition, much because of these previously mentioned issues; people also feel uncertainty, a loss of belonging, loss of language, etc. A goal for Mohawks, both the nation as a whole, and for many individuals, involves recovering, decolonizing, and regaining the confidence in that the Mohawk people are here to stay as a strong and viable nation, a people with good minds. I have tried to show some ways in which the people of Akwesasne are working toward healing through the revival and preservation of traditional values and culture traits.

There are still many obstacles, and a highly relevant question here is: what would characterize a healed Mohawk people? This is where different factions vary in opinions and methods.

The Akwesasne Freedom School and Native-run education in general today should be seen in relation to, and as a reaction to the assimilation policy. Through my case studies I have looked at it as a result of, and a part of traditionalism and the fight for sovereignty and self-determination. Traditional Native people themselves want to be able to teach their own children what they need to learn to know who they are, when relating to their own community and in mainstream, non-Native society. Traditional indigenous knowledge is highly valued in these schools, as opposed to the boarding schools that sought to eradicate this knowledge. At the boarding/residential schools traditional knowledge was not acknowledged as knowledge, but as remains of a ‘savage’ way of thinking that had to be removed from the person for him to ever be a member of the American society. With this backdrop, the Akwesasne Freedom School and the Kanatsiohareke Mohawk Community are traditionalist statements in themselves, an objection to the assimilation policy, and for Kanatsiohareke- an objection to the political and social circumstances in Akwesasne, in addition to wanting to preserve Mohawk culture and make a traditional presentation of the *Kanienkehaka* ways and teachings known to people.

The fasting ritual that takes place at Kanatsiohareke may work as a metaphor for the significance that the community and the Freedom School have for the people that are connected to it; the community and the school have become places that create a sense of balance and a way of connecting with one's core and one's strengths, so that one, stronger and more balanced, can relate to the world.

7.2 Expressing traditionalism

Traditionalism is largely connected to, and expressed through, symbolism, as identity must be symbolized in some way to be communicated. As traditionalists look to the traditional parts of the culture, cultural traits and characteristics that connect one's people to the past and distinct one's group from other ethnic groups, become central to the 'ideology' of traditionalism. Symbols are not necessarily physical objects, but ways of expressing oneself and one's world view in various manners.

In addition to the the internal discourses, Native American identities are often affected by non-Natives' interpretations and their relationship to the Native beliefs. A common problem in the relations between Natives and non-Natives is that there are many stereotypical ideas, from both perspectives. What these stereotypes have in common is that they are highly generalizing and simplified, as stereotypes usually are. One of my key informants expressed frustration over the fact that mainstream images of Natives seem to be stuck in the past, like when she had attended a hip-hop dance class, and her boss at work could not believe that "this nice little Indian girl went to a hip-hop class!". Stereotypical images of Natives are also present through names of sports teams, businesses, characters in Hollywood movies, etc.

Another issue is that of the New Age religion, which draws heavily on Native American cosmologies. "For [Native religious leaders] the New Age is a kind of *doppelgänger*, an evil imitation close enough to the real thing to upset the delicate balance of spiritual power maintained by Indian ritual spiritualists" (Brown 1998:201). During my fieldwork I observed the way some people who claimed to have indigenous ancestry were not taken seriously because they were trying too hard; "they are wearing just that one feather too much", and "anyone can claim to be anything these days", implying that over-communication is perceived by some as less authentic somehow.

All societies and cultures change continuously, as do relations between ethnic groups. Ethnicity is a relational form of social organization; one ascribes and is recognized by others as a distinct ethnic group (Barth 1969). An ethnic identity creates

stability, a sense of belonging and order in the universe. Ethnic identity is usually most important when people feel that it is threatened by other groups, and when threatened, cultural symbols are often over-communicated, in contrast to the forced or chosen under-communication of symbols when people are being under press of assimilation. Cultural symbols are used in battles for independence and sovereignty as a part of decolonizing and confirming identities. The production of symbols is a vital part of the existence of ideologies. These symbols define boundaries between groups, they give messages to the outside, but they are more relevant when internally symbolizing a sense of belonging and solidarity. This symbolism is amongst other things visible in Akwesasne in the form of clothes, hair, jewellery, use of language, political participation, etc.

In the Akwesasne context, cultural characteristics may be characterized as emblems (Briggs 1997), both because it is important to distance oneself from other ethnic groups when fighting for self-determination, as well as symbolizing belonging internally to one's people. Emblems are not necessarily connected to ethnicity, but are emotionally charged symbols that attach people to cultural identities (Barth 1993). An emblem, when used consciously or unconsciously, may become a marker for 'authenticity', especially for people who have come in from the outside, for instance did not grow up on the reservation, or who moved off the reservation and came back.

Briggs writes that traits that become emblems may be things that are no longer *needed* in today's society, and may no longer serve as cultural traits, but as emblems they are well suited to strengthen a sense of ethnic rootedness. An example of this is the Mohawk language, as it is not a practical *necessity* to speak the language to function well in society today. Many people learn to speak the language and how to use it in everyday life, though, as it is an important emblem for Mohawk identity, a source of belonging and connecting with one's ancestors, the Mohawk past, and one's culture.

Another example is the relationship to fishing and farming in Akwesasne, and the fact that it is no longer possible to survive by fishing or farming as a way of life, due to heavy pollution. At the Freedom School, the knowledge connected to this way of life is taught as a part of the curriculum. The fact that many people look to this situation with a sense of loss of culture, and the situation in itself, can thus be seen as a symbol of the fight that indigenous peoples have against the mainstream industrialized and capitalist society, a fight that is also reflected in many other areas of indigenous life. This may be an emblem in the sense of a specifically *indigenous* fight; in the upstate New York and south Ontario and Quebec for the Mohawk people in particular.

So why are cultural symbols and emblems important in processes of decolonization?

Traditionalist people in Akwesasne emphasize an identity as Mohawk, as indigenous, although situational and relative by context, and people often use emotionally charged symbols as expressions for their identity. The things that say something about who they are can't just be anything, it has to do with legitimate and illegitimate factors that are connected to a universe of meaning and the society's repertoire. Kapferer (1988) describes how nationalism often appeals to passionate and deep emotions in people, and it is often based on symbolism from myths and religion. Myths are socially effective in this way, and the competition about the past is a central part of ethnic and national mobilization. It's all about a group's right to tell it's own history (Hylland Eriksen 1998).

When people go through processes of decolonization and live by a traditionalist ideology, cultural symbols and traits become important markers of identity and belonging; markers to the outside world, and maybe more importantly, internal markers of for instance ideological or spiritual identity, as with pro- versus anti-gamblers, or Longhouse people versus Catholics.

The presented cases work as examples of how this takes place, how traditional myths, stories, language, and symbols that say something about one's past as a people and culture in a pre-colonial context, are still relevant and central as a part of one's history, a connection to a continuous past and present. These things thus become meaningful emblems and identity markers internally, as well as to the external world.

Hylland Eriksen said that a traditional life is impossible, while 'traditionalism', as a modern ideology that emphasizes tradition, is an alternative to the insecurity and turbulence in the world. By using 'traditionalist' symbols, people can create a sense of continuity with the past, even if there have been dramatic fractions and changes. We know that Mohawk symbols are part of a continuity between the past and the present, they may be historically 'correct' or not, but many Mohawks still have an active relation with them today. Mohawk tradition creates a felt and real connection and continuity with the past, and may not be seen just as political constructions.

7.3 Language and education

The cases I have addressed, the Akwesasne Freedom School and Kanatsiohareke are arenas where people come who consciously emphasize tradition and who want to make

sure of its continuous existence. When I asked people why this is so important, they emphasized that they wanted the young generations to *know who they are*.

The community-run educational system presents an arena where processes of revival take place, as with the language classes at Kanatsiohareke, and in the curriculum and structure of the Akwesasne Freedom School. A postcolonial education for indigenous peoples begins with exploring symbols, expressions, and philosophy of indigenous education, and creating the context they need to make sense of who they are, and to assert that sensibility in all aspects of their lives. “It begins with Indigenous peoples knowing their languages, their metaphors, their symbols, their characters, their stories, their teachers, and their teachings” (Battiste 2000: xxviii). Native-run education is empowering in its contribution to furthering knowledge and cultural belonging, and thus represents an important step towards healing as a community and people.

Language is a very important part of the consciousness surrounding the survival and existence of the Mohawk culture. The language has both cultural and political importance in contemporary Native societies, and many brought it up to me as a very significant part of being Mohawk. It does not seem to be a determining criterion for people when defining themselves, and when being defined, as Mohawk, but it is a part of the cultural heritage that is important for many people in their lives. Many people have had to teach themselves the language, if it was not spoken in their home when they grew up. Others speak the language in their home, but not in public. Many feel the shame that their parents or grandparents felt at school, when they were punished for speaking Mohawk. Some people also feel ridiculed by fluent speakers if they speak with an accent, and so they choose not to speak *Kanienkeha* at all.

As it is at the Akwesasne Freedom School, *Haudenosaunee* people to a large extent focus on knowing the traditional language, although there are few fluent speakers. Many people have learned it on their own, and many who do not know it point it out as something they would like to learn. *Kanienkeha* reflects a world view that is separate from the English-speaking majority’s, the words contain cultural information and traditional knowledge that many people who do not speak the language feel that they cannot fully understand. One of my informants told me that she knew she could not fully understand her neighbour because he was brought up in a Mohawk-speaking home, and is a fluent speaker, and she is not.

The challenge for not only the Freedom School, but for indigenous schools in general today, is to transform education from its imperialistic and assimilating roots, to a

decolonizing process that embraces and accepts diversity as normative, and that embraces cultural knowledge as valuable and empowering. Many of the students at the Freedom School do not answer in Mohawk or talk amongst themselves in Mohawk, only when asked to in class. Teachers and parents expressed to me that it is difficult to teach the students the language if they do not speak it at home or if their parents do not work with them and help them. This is a difficult matter, since many of the parents do not know the language or feels shame or embarrassed about speaking it. This is often a problem in indigenous language education in areas where the language is so small and not of essential practical use. It thus becomes hard work to keep the language alive. Some people in the field expressed that knowing the language is a “bonus”, while others emphasized it as a very important part of being Mohawk.

“They are going to need it wherever they go, because that’s who they are...”
(Faithkeeper about the Mohawk language and the AFS students)

The Mohawk experience with residential schools and the current existence of Native-run schools can easily be compared to the situation of the indigenous Sami people of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia; a people who was subject for an aggressive assimilation policy through centuries. In the 18th and 19th Century, children were sent to boarding schools and punished for speaking their own language. They were considered inferior to the majority population, who were influenced by a social darwinistic and nationalist mindset. A widespread belief was that if the Sami did not become Norwegian, they would not survive. This idea was also enhanced in relation to a belief about ‘purity of race’, that is would be dangerous if the different ethnic groups mixed with each other. For a while the government planned to give the Sami a reservation in the northernmost parts of the country, though this did not happen. It was not until around 1970 that the politics went from assimilation to a politics of plurality, and the Sami culture went through revitalization, and ethnic symbols were again activated. The long period of assimilation had left many Sami without their native language and sense of belonging in the Sami culture. However, in the young generations today, a revitalization movement and sense of pride has grown. Today one can find Sami-run schools and kindergartens, as well as a Sami University College in Kautokeino (Guovdageaidnu) in the north of Norway, where traditional Sami knowledge and language is emphasized and forms the basis for the research and teaching performed at the school.

7.4 Healing and medicine as metaphors

In looking at the preservation of tradition as decolonization, ‘healing’ seems to be a relevant and useful metaphor for this process. Healing and ‘decolonizing’ is a spiritual and mental process, as well as a political one. As mentioned, medicine is in Native American terms not equivalent to the ‘Western’ idea of medicine, but can be found in plants, songs, stories, dancing, etc., anything that balances things out and brings peace. For example, Mohawks say that when one has worked hard throughout the day, one should balance it by dancing together at night. ‘Socials’ are held at important days, but also after a long day when people gather around a bonfire.

The *Haudenosaunee* Creation story tells how the right handed twin created good things that would be helpful to the people, and the left handed twin was trying to imitate his brother’s creation, but got the opposite result. This way, their creations balanced out. Healing and medicine are highly present factors in Mohawk traditional life, a concept representing the things that give people joy, uplift them, and that heal from pain. Medicine plants are an important part of this. Among the medicine plants, there are some created by the right-handed twin, and some by the left-handed twin. There are many things one should remember when gathering, storing and preparing medicine plants, practices that have been passed on through generations. One should for instance leave something, preferably tobacco, to replace the plant. It is important to pay respect and acknowledgement to the medicines, so that they will remain for the next seven generations.

‘Healing’ and ‘medicine’ thus work as good and meaningful metaphors for the maintenance of Mohawk culture and identity. The ambiguity and insecurity felt by many indigenous peoples do not correspond with a sense of balance in the world, and processes of rediscovering and redefining what it means and involves being Mohawk is important for many people. As with medicine plants, Mohawks say that one should always think seven generation ahead, to make sure that everything is done for the best for the generations to come.

7.5 Conclusive remarks

I perceive that a part of the goal of traditionalism in the form I have looked at through my case studies, is connected to a healing process for individuals and society on a path towards decolonization, through finding one’s place in the world and trusting it to be valuable and true, and doing it through one’s own definitions and perspectives. The

challenges that continuously face Mohawk people today take place within a context of pressure from the hegemonic, mainstream society to assimilate into a homogenized world, and so many people work to preserve and revive the culture and language.

Arenas like the Freedom School and Kanatsiohareke provide a basis for knowing the Mohawk culture and establishing an identity in the present, a connection to the past and the future. The future of traditional Mohawk identities and the Mohawk language is dependent, though, on the engagement of people who continue the work to preserve it. The painful experiences when cultures, languages, and identities were, or came close to being lost, especially during the residential school era, remain stressful and challenging today. To make sure that the culture and language are not lost involves closing the gap, to heal the wound, so to speak, and thus healing as a people. This is an important step in the process towards sovereignty, self-definition, and reclaiming a voice as an indigenous people.

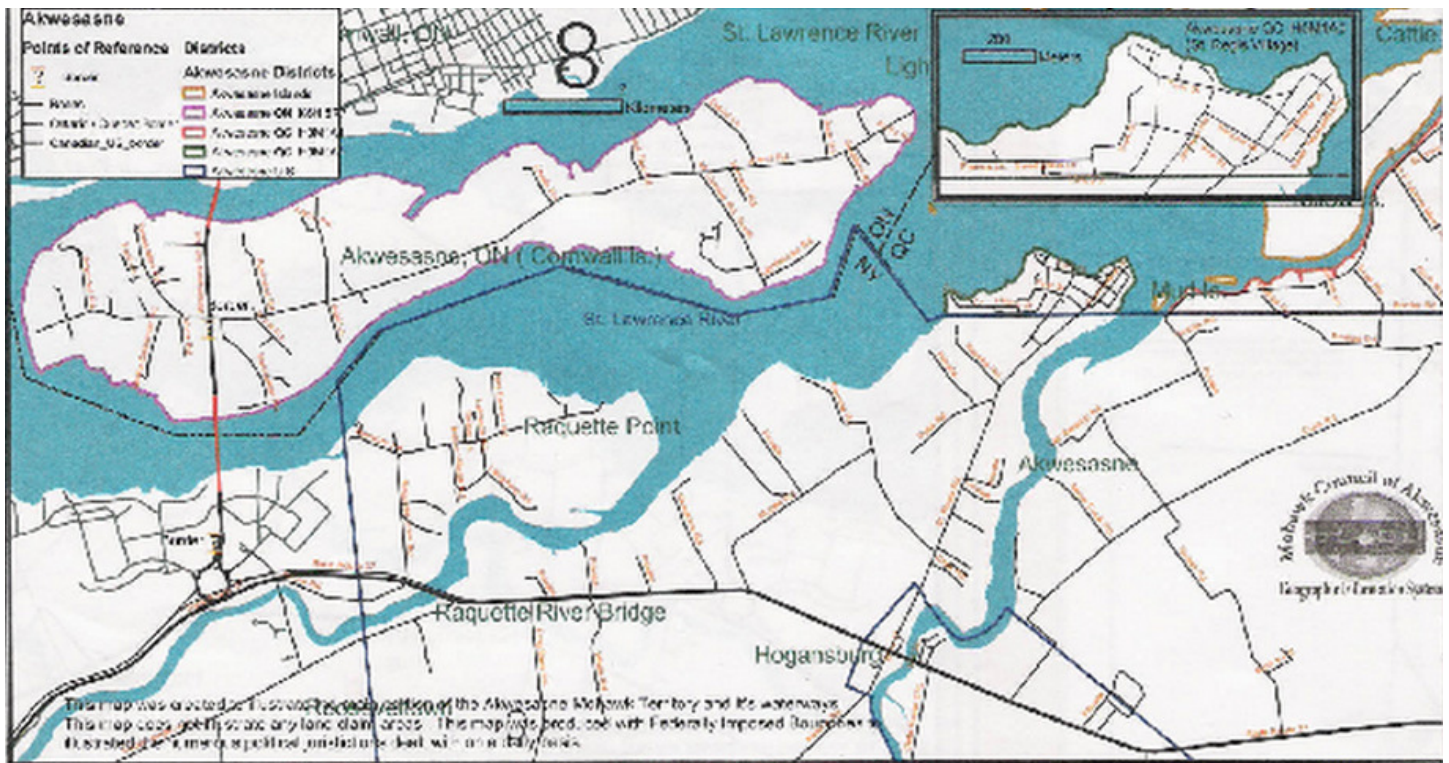
Anthropologists who argued that traditions are inventions and constructions, seem to underestimate the significance tradition has in the present, and in forming the future. By seeing tradition in opposition to modernity, one seems to not recognize that tradition exists with significance in various forms as a reality, in modernity; thus it is not something other than modernity, but a part of it. My point is that for many traditional Mohawks, preserving tradition is a goal in itself, not a construction to reach a political goal in the present, because it represents healing and redefining the present and future as a people in relation to the world. This thesis focuses on tradition, but I point out that not all Mohawks see revival of traditional culture as a part of the future, or relevant as a 'decolonizing factor'. Tradition is not important for everyone, and traditionalists are no more "authentically" Mohawk than non-traditional Mohawks. When emphasizing tradition, I support Laenui's argument that the first step and basis of decolonization is rediscovering one's people's traditions, because it is empowering to know one's people's background as the basis for one's community.

I wanted to do this fieldwork and write this thesis as a contribution to, and support of, indigenous peoples' work towards self-determination. I have given examples from a people and communities that seem to be on the path towards succeeding, although they still face many challenges. I have addressed arenas in Mohawk communities today where processes of revitalization and preservation of culture, language, and traditional values are highly, and explicitly, present, though affected by internal differences. I have further

viewed this in a context of working towards decolonization and the healing of wounds caused by colonialism in the past and present.



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³⁰ <http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/namerica/usstates/ny.htm>

³¹ Mohawk Council of Akwesasne Geographic Information System

Appendix 1: Glossary

<i>Akwesasneron</i>	a person from Akwesasne
<i>Aiionwatha</i>	The Peacemaker's helper. Also known as Hiawatha.
<i>Deganawida</i>	"The Peacemaker"
<i>Guswhenta</i>	The Two Row Wampum
<i>Haudenosaunee/ Rotinonshonni</i>	"The People of the Longhouse", The Iroquois Confederacy
<i>Hodiskengehdah</i>	'all the men who carry the bones, the burden of their ancestors, on their backs'. The Mohawk word for Warrior.
<i>Kahnienkehaka</i>	"The People of the Flint"
<i>Kanien'keha:ka Aohsera</i>	The Ceremonial year of the Longhouse.
<i>Kaianerakowa</i>	The Great Law of Peace
<i>Kaniatario</i>	Handsome Lake
<i>Kanienkeh</i>	The Mohawk language
<i>Kanikenriio</i>	"A Good Mind"
<i>Kariwiiio</i>	The Code of Handsome Lake
<i>Kastowah</i>	traditional headdress
<i>Kontiianehson</i>	The Clan mothers
<i>Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen</i>	"The Words that Come Before All Else", also known as the Thanksgiving Address and The Opening Address.
<i>Onkwe:honwe</i>	"The Original/First people". Indigenous peoples, specifically Native Americans/First Nations.
<i>Roia:ne</i>	"Man of the Good Mind"
<i>Sawiskera</i>	"Mischievous One". The Left-handed Twin in the Creation Story
<i>skanonhsakará:ti</i>	"one side of the house", a moiety in the Longhouse
<i>Sonkwaiatison</i>	"He Who Created Us". The Creator.

Teharonhiawako

“The Holder of the Sky”/ “He Embraces the Sky”. The Right-handed Twin in the Creation Story

Tewaarathon

Lacrosse

Appendix 2:

Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen

-'The Words That Come Before All Else'

The People

Today we have gathered and we see that the cycles of life continues. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now, we bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as People.

Now our minds are one.

The Earth Mother

We are thankful to our Mother, the Earth, for she gives us all that we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk upon her. It gives us joy that she continues to care for us as she has from the beginning of time. To our Mother, we send greetings and thanks.

Now our minds are one.

The Waters

We give thanks to all the Waters of the world for quenching our thirst and providing us with strength. Water is life. We know its power in many forms – waterfalls and rain, mists and streams, rivers and oceans. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to the spirit of Water.

Now our minds are one.

The Fish

We turn our minds to all the Fish life in the water. They were instructed to cleanse and purify the water. They also give themselves to us as food. We are grateful that we can still find pure water. So, we turn now to the Fish and send our greetings and thanks.

Now our minds are one.

The Plants

Now we turn toward the vast fields of Plant life. As far as the eye can see, the Plants grow, working many wonders. They sustain many life forms. With our minds gathered together, we give thanks and look forward to seeing Plant life for many generations to come.

Now our minds are one.

The Food Plants

With one mind, we turn to honor and thank all the Food Plants we harvest from the garden. Since the beginning of time, the grains, vegetables, beans and berries have helped the people survive. Many other living things draw strength from them too. We gather all the Plant Foods together as one and send them a greeting and thanks.

Now our minds are one.

The Medicine Herbs

Now we turn to all the Medicine Herbs of the world. From the beginning, they were instructed to take away sickness. They are always waiting and ready to heal us. We are happy there are still among us those special few who remember how to use these plants for healing. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to the Medicines and to the keepers of the Medicines.

Now our minds are one.

The Animals

We gather our minds together to send greetings and thanks to all the Animal life in the world. They have many things to teach us as people. We see them near our homes and in the deep forests. We are glad they are still here and we hope that it will always be so.

Now our minds are one.

The Trees

We now turn our thoughts to the Trees. The Earth has many families of Trees who have their own instructions and uses. Some provide us with shelter and shade, others with fruit, beauty and other useful things. Many peoples of the world use a Tree as a symbol of peace and strength. With one mind, we greet and thank the Tree life.

Now our minds are one.

The Birds

We put our minds together as one and thank all the Birds who move and fly about over our heads. The Creator gave them beautiful songs. Each day they remind us to enjoy and appreciate life. The Eagle was chosen to be their leader. To all the Birds – from the smallest to the largest – we send our joyful greetings and thanks.

Now our minds are one.

The Four Winds

We are all thankful to the powers we know as the Four Winds. We hear their voices in the moving air as they refresh us and purify the air we breathe. They help to bring the change of seasons. From the four directions they come, bringing us messages and giving us strength. With one mind, we send our greetings and thanks to the Four Winds.

Now our minds are one

The Thunderers

Now we turn to the west where our Grandfathers, the Thunder Beings, live. With lightning and thundering voices, they bring with them the water that renews life. We bring our minds together as one to send greetings and thanks to our Grandfathers, the Thunderers.

Now our minds are one.

The Sun

We now send our greetings and thanks to our eldest Brother, the Sun. Each day without fail he travels the sky from east to west, bringing the light of a new day. He is the source of all the fires of life. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to our Brother, the Sun.

Now our minds are one.

Grandmother Moon

We put our minds together and give thanks to our oldest Grandmother, the Moon, who lights the nighttime sky. She is the leader of women all over the world, and she governs the movement of the ocean tides. By her changing face we measure time, and it is the Moon who watches over the arrival of children here on Earth. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to our Grandmother, the Moon.

Now our minds are one.

The Stars

We give thanks to the Stars who are spread across the sky like jewelry. We see them in the night, helping the Moon to light the darkness and bringing dew to the gardens and growing things. When we travel at night, they guide us home. With our minds gathered together as one, we send greetings and thanks to all the Stars.

Now our minds are one.

The Enlightened Teachers

We gather our minds to greet and thank the enlightened Teachers who have come to help throughout the ages. When we forget how to live in harmony, they remind us of the way we were instructed to live as people. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to these caring Teachers.

Now our minds are one.

The Creator

Now we turn our thoughts to the Creator, or Great Spirit, and send greetings and thanks for all the gifts of Creation. Everything we need to live a good life is here on this Mother Earth. For all the love that is still around us, we gather our minds together as one and send our choicest words of greetings and thanks to the Creator.

Now our minds are one.

Closing Words

We have now arrived at the place where we end our words. Of all the things we have named, it was not our intention to leave anything out. If something was forgotten, we leave it to each individual to send such greetings and thanks in their own way.

And now our minds are one.

Appendix 3

The Haudenosaunee Creation Story

In the beginning, the World was not as we know it. It was a water world inhabited only by Animals and Creatures of the air who could survive without Land. The Sky World was quite different. Human-type Being lived there with infinite types of Plants and Animals to enjoy.

In Sky World, there was a Tree of Life that was very special to the People of the Sky World. They knew that it grew at the entrance to the world below and forbade anyone to tamper with the Tree. One woman who was soon to give birth was curious about what was beneath the Tree and convinced her husband to uproot it.

Beneath the Tree was a vast dark hole. The woman peered from the edge into the hole and suddenly fell off the edge. As she fell, she grasped at whatever she could. When at length she opened her hands, much later, she would find that she had brought with her strawberries and tobacco. To the Haudenosaunee, these were the first Medicines, plants of true power, for they originate in the Sky World at the beginning of these times.

As Sky Woman fell into the World below, the Birds of the World were disturbed and alerted to her distress. The water birds, Duck and Geese, rose to break her fall with their wings. The great Turtle came to the surface of the waters to give her a place to rest on landing.

The Creatures of the Water believed that she needed Land to live on, so they set about to collect some for her. They dove to the great depths of the World's oceans to gather Earth to make her a place to live. Many of the Water Animals tried to gather the Earth from the ocean floor but were unsuccessful. It was Otter, who, after many attempts, was successful in bringing the Earth to Turtle's back.

With only a small bit of Earth from within Otter's small paws. Turtle Island began to grow. The Sky Woman soon gave birth to her Daughter on Turtle Island. Over time, the Daughter grew into maturity. One night she was visited by the spirit of the "West Wind". She became pregnant and her children were to become the sons of the "West Wind", for she was pregnant with twin boys.

Soon, the Daughter of Sky Woman gave birth to twin sons. The twins were very different from each other, from the very beginning of their lives. It is even said that they argued while they were still in her womb.

One was born the natural way and he was to be called Teharonhiawako, the holder of the Sky, and he was Right-Handed. The other Twin was born unnaturally, breaking out through his mother's side and killing her. He was to be called Sawiskera, and he was Left-Handed. The Grandmother of the Twins mistook which Twin had caused the death of

her daughter and from that day on favored Sawiskera over Teharonhiawako.

Sky Woman placed the plants and leaves that she had saved from the Sky World onto her Daughter's grave. Not long after, over her daughter's head grew Corn, Beans, and Squash. These were later known as the "Three Sisters", and became the main food staple for the Haudenosaunee. From the Daughter's heart grew the sacred tobacco which would be used later as an offering to send greetings to the Creator. At her feet grew the strawberry plants, as well as other plants that would be used as medicines to cure sickness.

After the twins grew up, Skywoman, the Twins grandmother, came to the end of her life. When she died, the Twins fought over her body and pulled it apart, throwing her head into the sky. As part of the Sky World, there her head remained to shine upon the world as Grandmother Moon.

The Right and Left-Handed Twins were endowed with special creative powers. The Right-Handed Twin created gentle hills, beautiful smelling flowers, quiet brooks, butterflies, and numerous creatures, plants, and other earthly formations. His brother, the Left-Handed Twin, followed behind trying to make his own creations or altering his brother's. He made snakes, put thorns on rose bushes, and other attributes that are considered disturbing in today's world (Williams 1999).

When Teharonhiawako created the waters, the plants, the trees, and the animals in the World, he decided to create a creature in his own image, from the natural world. He decided to create more than one creature, and give each of them the same instructions to see how they would perform them. The first creature Teharonhiawako created was from the bark of a tree, the second from the foam of the ocean, the third from the black earth, and the fourth from the red earth. He did all of this in one day. First, he picked some bark from the tree of life, and molded it into the shape of a human. When he looked at it with the light from the sky in the background, the shape looked yellow. Teharonhiawako decided that this was a type of human that should exist in this world. Then he went to the big, salty ocean and took some white foam from the sea. Along with other elements from nature, he created another human shape. Then Teharonhiawako travelled to a deep forest and picked up some black dirt, and along with other elements from nature, he created another human shape. Now Teharonhiawako thought for himself: 'the day is ending, and I have created three creatures. Since everything in this world happens in cycles of four, I shall create another creature'. So he looked to find something different in nature, and found some red dirt. Again he combined this with elements from nature, and created a fourth being. When he was finished, he noticed that this creature blended very well into the natural surroundings. When all the four types of humans were created, he gave them life.

The white creature was the first to move around, he was curious and was studying his surroundings. Then the black and yellow creatures started to move slowly. When the black creature picked up a bright-coloured object from the ground, the white creature attacked him, threw him on the ground, and took the object for himself. Then the yellow creature came to help the black, and they were all fighting. Teharonhiawako noticed that

the fourth creature was still sitting on the ground, camouflaged by the surroundings. It became obvious to Teharionhiawako that the four creatures couldn't live in the same environment and survive. He stopped the fight, and said to them: 'there is a reason why you were not created the same way, just as there are birds and animals who look the same, but who are different in their own way. So are you. That is why I have created you, so that you in time will learn to respect the differences between you and appreciate them. I will help you with this, but first I have to separate you. You shall come together again after some time, after I have sent a messenger who will come to all of you and show you the way to be grateful for the good things and to show respect for other living creatures'. Then Teharonhiawako sent the white, the black and the yellow creature over the salty water and placed them far from each other. The red creature he let stay in the place of origin, and said to him: 'You shall be called Onkwehonwe – The original being. You shall call me Sonkwaiatison –The Creator. You were created from the dirt on this island. Now I understand that you would not survive with the others, because you blend in with nature, and that is a good thing, but you will need some time before you can be with the other creatures'. Now Teharonhiawako thought for himself: 'They will all have a chance at knowing the reason why they exist, and to find a good way of living' (Indian Times 2004).

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